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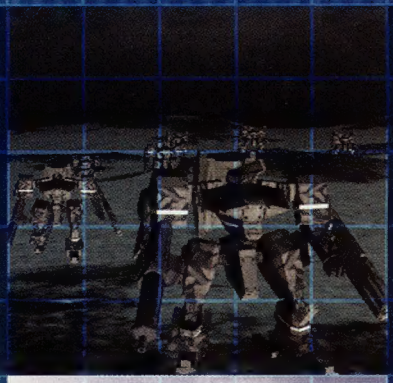
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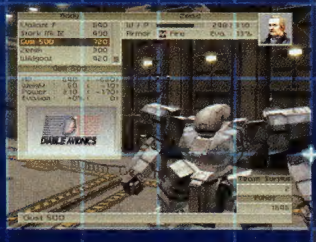
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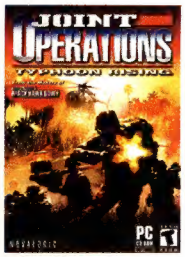


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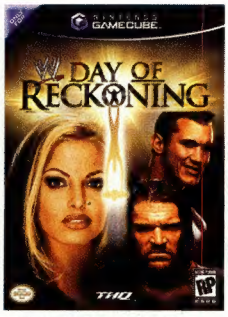
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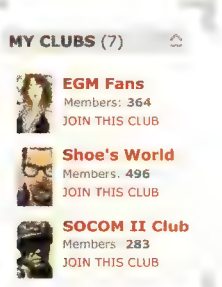


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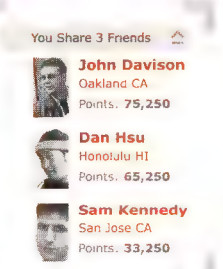
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GMR

GET MORE FROM YOUR GAMES

LIVIN' ON A PRAYER

Ahh, we're halfway there. "There" is 2004, and we're heading into the exciting half.

The *GMR* posse has returned from a week in L.A. at the super-dreck-tacular E3. I won't lie—it was a fun week. Things got off to a great start with what I can only describe as the most extraordinary gaming event I've ever attended: the *Final Fantasy* "Dear Friends" concert, in which the Los Angeles Philharmonic performed the works of Nobuo Uematsu. Square is talking about a national tour, and let's hope that happens. Even if for some twisted reason you're not an *FF* fan, you have to go—it's that good.

Of course, the point of the week was to take a gander at the mountain of games looking to ship sometime in the future. Now just imagine that everything that's planned to ship by the end of the year actually does (OMG. That would make 2004 nothing short of legendary. A partial list should be enough to make you you-know-what your pants: *Halo 2*, *Half-Life 2*, *GTA: San Andreas*, the Nintendo DS, and a few of my personal faves, *Donkey Kong: Jungle Beat*, *LOTR: Battle for Middle-Earth*, and *GoldenEye 2*. Yoot Saito's *Odama*, a sort of RTS-meets-pinball game, and *Katamari Damacy*, in which you roll around the gamescape picking up things like lawn chairs and people in a bizarre attempt to amass the biggest ball of stuff, are proof that there's still imagination in this industry.

I could go on. But I won't. Instead, I'll insist you read a very special edition of NEXT, featuring our top picks of E3—and a lot of excellent reasons why you should start saving your money right now.

_Tom Byron, EIC



ZIFF DAVIS MEDIA ANNOUNCES NEW GMR FALL 2004 LINEUP!

Los Angeles, CA—May 13, 2004 (PR)—Ziff Davis Media (NYSE: ZDM) is pleased to announce its fall *GMR* lineup for 2004. Offering misadventure to serious misadventure, *GMR* is once again poised to be the undisputed No. 1 leader in the field of things that are totally awesome and exciting.

TOM BYRON - EDITOR-IN-CHIEF



The legend continues this fall as *GMR* returns to its realistic and mature roots with *The Legend of Byron: The Washboard of Time*. The CEO has been kidnapped by the FTC's minions, casting darkness throughout the entire fiscal year. Use the enchanted Washboard of Time to guide the elfin Byron through the past, present, and future...and save the CEO and restore Q4's P/E ratio!

JAMES MIELKE - EXECUTIVE EDITOR



Adding a new dimension to the *GMR* family, *James Mielke Online* is the world's first massively multiplayer online editor. A mysterious fog hangs over the land of Inner Richmond'ia, and it's up to you to find out why. Pick from three unique races, over 100 different character classes, and the color of your socks, then set off on an adventure that ends only when your checking account is dry!

CARRIE SHEPHERD - MANAGING EDITOR



You loved her in *Carrie Shepherd: Wisecrackin'* and *Carrie Shepherd: Collect All 100!* Now she's back in *Carrie Shepherd: Anthropomorphic Mascot & Funny Sidekick 4*, the sequel to last month's critically acclaimed *Carrie Shepherd: Anthropomorphic Mascot & Funny Sidekick 3*. Armed with an all-new gun, she's on the lookout for the dastardly Penguin! Penguin. Can Iceopolis be saved in time?

ANDREW PFISTER - ASSOCIATE EDITOR



Yo, "players!" It's time to kick it to the "streetz" and say "peace out" to boredom with *Andrew Pfister's Thugz 'n' Drugz*. A good editor turned bad, it's up to "Tha Pfist" to clean up San Francisco's "gangsta" element. True open-ended gameplay that's totally "dope" and a soundtrack that's "off of the hook" will most certainly make *Thugz 'n' Drugz* the "bomb-shizzle" this holiday season!

CHRISTIAN NUTT - ASSOCIATE EDITOR



The German army is on the offensive, and the only way to stop it is through the beaches of Normandy. In *Christian Nutt: Men and Medals of Glory, Honor, Valor and Duty*, do your part in the most realistic depiction of World War II to date. Actual human blood will spurt out of your monitor with every shot, while American schoolchildren will know nothing about you, but will know the words to every Britney Spears song.

GERRY SERRANO - ART DIRECTOR



Kick off the fall season with *Gerry Serrano 2005*. All team rosters and jerseys have been updated (including the expansion Rey Serrano franchise), and 17 percent more animations have been added to players' hip and lower-leg areas. Explore the depth of the new franchise mode: Sign new artists, draft photographers right out of college, and even set the whiskey prices in your own stadium.

CAROLINE KING - DESIGNER



The magazine industry is in trouble. With all the game mags looking more or less the same, it's time designers are presented with new ways of thinking about page layouts. Hence the Caroline King DS, featuring two screens, one that is touch sensitive and another that can READ YOUR VERY THOUGHTS—eliminating the need for traditional and outdated means of communication.

GMR

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POST

THE "WE HAD A BAD MONTH AND ARE TAKING IT OUT ON YOU" EDITION



→ Although last month's cover story concerned both upcoming *Kingdom Hearts* games, the art was taken from *Chain of Memories*. When was the last time you saw a GBA game featured on the cover of a magazine? We do it because we love you.

WHAT ARE OPINIONS LIKE?

I must say, of all the magazines I have read in my 20-plus years as a gamer, yours is clearly the worst. You have some of the most absurd opinions that don't even compare to your competition. For instance, how could you say that *Siren* is better than *Clock Tower 3*? Videogames.com rated it just as I would have, but you all blow game after game. How could you say that *Manhunt* is a 4/10? The game was a masterpiece. From the moment you turned it on, you were probably thinking *GTA* meets *Shawshank Redemption*. But it was a stealth game, not a random killing spree. The last game you totally blew was *Red Dead Revolver*. Now that was one of the greatest games ever made because it depicted the West flawlessly. If everyone relied on your opinions for games alone, the market would crash, because what you see as classic is soooooo shallow.

_Sherard

And if everyone relied on your opinions, we'd all be stupid.

REMAKING OUT

I feel like the NES classic series (GBA) is a kind of a double-edged sword. Sure, you get to play some great old-school games such as *The Legend of Zelda* on your GBA. The downside: That's all it is. Now the chances of a remake similar to *Metroid: Zero Mission* are pretty much gone. Just imagine how cool it would be to play a *Zelda* with better graphics, new weapons, and dungeons.

_Jared Thorbahn
Newark, OH

We had been holding out hope that the original NES *Legend of Zelda* would eventually be given a nice remake, à la *Super Mario All-Stars* or *Metroid: Zero Mission*. That hope is kept alive only by Nintendo's never-ending pursuit of our money.

INCOHERENT JERK: SPECIAL EDITION

GMR obtained a special edition of this letter, which features a bonus writer's commentary track:



→ Apparently, gaming doesn't get much better than this.

Your magazine sucks. I don't know how you people got jobs rating games. (With this opening salvo, I intended to instill a sense of self-doubt in the *GMR* editors. This will have them second-guessing themselves and their choice of career for the rest of the letter.) First of all, Better Than, Not As Good As, and Wait For It don't make any sense. (Here, by selecting an aspect of the magazine that has already been addressed numerous times, I hoped to curry favor with other disgruntled readers who share the same opinion.) The Game Geezer is the most boring thing in your magazine, a toothless old man with people talking to him about games—what does he know, even he has more brains than you →

MESSAGE BOARD JUNKIES

Enter GMR's Eternal Discotorium by clicking the Boards link at www.gmrmagazine.com. Remember, fellas: Feathered hats and platform boots are mandatory. Now, MBJs, you've got E3 opinions? Drop 'em like they're HOT!

I liked the usual: *Zelda* was sweet, *MGS3* was sweet, and so-on and so forth. However the one thing I'm most psyched about is *Animal Crossing* on the DS, i.e., virtual crack made portable.
_LuigiSunshine

The game that surprised me the most, concerning fun, was *Jungle Beat*. I didn't expect it, and I didn't expect it to be much fun. But traversing the levels with those Konga drums left me with quite the fuzzy feeling (or at least a furry one). The lack of enough playable PSP games surprised me, though. I really expected it to have some sort of killer app (and *Metal Gear Acid* isn't one of them, IMO).
_XenoBach

I think the most exciting and important news of the show was EA joining Xbox Live. If there was any doubt in even the most one-sided minds about Xbox being a major contender, it's now gone. EA reels in the big mainstream fish. It's the shot in the arm that Xbox needed.
_Alt_Ctrl_Delete

Anyway, I really liked the DS. I think that the dual screens could really bring some new life into all the games coming out. Originality is important. And why would you not like →


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people, maybe he should write for your magazine. (The plan here was to intentionally utilize poor sentence structure and incongruent logic to further add to the editors' collective confusion.) In case you haven't figured it out, this magazine sucks. (The blindsiding, emotional climax of the correspondence comes out of nowhere and surely convinces the *GMR* staff that their efforts fail to meet the minimum standard of game writing, as deemed by myself.) SUCKS SUCKS SUCKS SUCKS SUCKS SUCKSSUCKSSUCKS! (They sucks.)

_DJPHAT2004@cs.com



→ You know what Hentai is? The exact opposite of this.

THEY'RE NOT REAL GIRLS

First off, I want to say that I love your magazine. I like being able to look at one source for all my gaming needs. I have a PC, Xbox, PS2, and GBA, and I like being able to see all the new things coming out for each one. My question is, are we ever going to get the Hentai dating-sim games? I have played only a few at a website called Newgrounds and really thought they were good. I also saw some on X-Play on TechTV. I would like to get some in and play them. I know a lot of people think they are stupid, but for the people out there who do like them, I believe they would sell very well. Also, there is an AO rating, so why doesn't the ESRB use it? All the videogame companies cut back so they don't get it, but why not just get an AO rating? I would still buy AO-rated games, and I'm sure a lot of other adults out there would, too. But if there are any plans to bring the dating sims Stateside, I would like to know.

_Ben Guess

Seek help, you dirty, dirty man.

THE GOOD OL' DAYS

I have a question that has never, ever been answered. Hopefully you can help me out. My question is this: How can I accumulate the first couple issues of *GMR*? I started my subscription at issue #04 (oh is me..!), and I have been faithful to sweet, sweet *GMR* since. I would very much like to own the first three copies if at all possible. Perhaps you men and lady folk will post this question, seeing as many people might like to hear the answer, but it's all good.

P.S. *GMR* is cool beans.

_Steely Phil, NC

Unfortunately, there currently are no options to purchase back issues of *GMR*, but we are working on that, so stay tuned. But it's entirely possible that the very early issues are lost forever, perhaps to resurface one day as part of a Smithsonian exhibit on the golden era of game journalism. Or if someone digs up their backyard. And thanks for the kind words...we sorta feel better now. Now somebody write us some good letters.

Mario Pinball? Mario is the ball! That's hilarious!
_cheesebuster

Along with *MGS3*, another thing that piqued my interest was Microsoft's big three exclusive RPGs—*Sudeki*, *Fable*, and *Jade Empire*. As if *KOTOR* wasn't enough, having three RPGs on one console made by companies whose name doesn't start with "Square," ends with "Enix," and rhymes with "Square Enix."
TheNudeSmurf

OK, I want to know what was up with Sega. All the talk about its "SEGATON" announcement had me excited, and when it announced that it would be publishing *The Matrix Online*, I didn't even realize that was the big announcement. The next day I was asking a friend about it and nearly fainted. Way to go Sega, you let me down again.
GopherCakes

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I think we're in for another genre-defining moment for survival horror

Most Anticipated of 2004 award – IGN

Call of Cthulhu filled us with awe and dread.

Best of E3 award – Gamespy

Bethesda once again blazes a trail in the gaming world.

ActionTrip

CALL of CTHULHU

Dark Corners of the Earth



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XBOX

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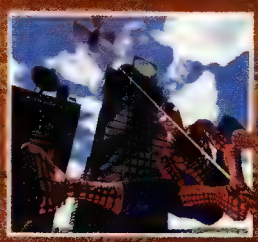
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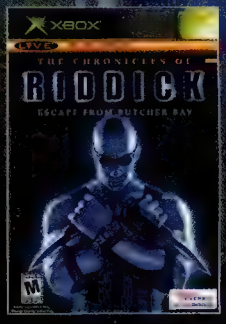


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UNIVERSAL

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XBOX

XBOX LIVE ONLINE ENABLED

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RIDDICK

ESCAPE FROM BUTCHER BAY

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PS1
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PS2

FRONT

GMR NEWS NETWORK

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What kind of man makes an all-girl wrestler?

FINAL FANTASY: DEAR FRIENDS 039
A report on the first U.S. videogame concert









→ Above, Square Enix's *Fullmetal Alchemist and the Broken Angel* marks the company's first multimedia onslaught, with anime, manga, and a game all in the works. Think along the lines of *.hack*, but sold as a single game. Above right, BioWare's *Dragon Age* rocks PC RPGs, and at right, Link has matured in the new *Legend of Zelda*.

WHEN E3 ATTACKS

COOL? YES. SURPRISING? MAYBE NOT...

U.S.A.

As far as E3s go, this year's was low on surprises. We're deeply entrenched in the current console generation, and it seems most publishers are content to just put out excellent software. Who are we to argue?

Over on the PC side, *Half-Life 2* once again captured the attention of gamers. Perhaps the biggest and most pleasant PC surprise was BioWare's *Dragon Age*, a brand-new RPG that uses *Lord of the Rings*–style visual technology to showcase thousands of combatants on your screen. It marks the company's first foray into an original PC RPG universe.

Of course, Sony's PSP and Nintendo's DS caught the most attention. In an interesting DS twist, Tecmo's Tomonobu Itagaki, the man behind *Ninja Gaiden*, has pledged support for the fledgling system and not Sony's PSP. We can only imagine what kind of game he'll make.

Nintendo did make some splashes beyond the DS, though. The company debuted a brand-new, realistic *Zelda* game at the end of its press conference, drawing gasps and shouts of glee from the attendees. Immediately after, *Zelda* creator Shigeru Miyamoto leapt onto the stage, wielding Link's sword and shield (sadly, no tights).

That display was triumphant, but President Satoru Iwata's talk will likely mean more in the long run. He spoke of Nintendo's drive to revolutionize gaming with its next console. Nintendo has since revealed that we can expect to see it at the next E3. Given the direction the DS is going, it's clear that the company is moving toward offering unexpected gaming experiences; the company's future is now riding on this creativity.

Sega promised a shocker for the beginning of the show. Speculation ran rampant, but no one expected the company to be publishing PC MMO *The Matrix Online*. Meanwhile, Square Enix is moving into the realm of anime tie-ins for the first time with its own *Fullmetal Alchemist*; it will handle the game, while Funimation, the people behind the U.S. release of *Dragon Ball Z*, will distribute the cartoon. In the wackiest surprise of the show, Namco showed off *Katamari Damacy*—check out last issue's International Report—albeit with no promise that it's actually journeying West. Still, it augurs well, and that's something we never expected.

TRUE FANTASY DEAD, OFFLINE

XBOX LOSES ITS MMORPG

U.S.A.



In the latest "Microsoft canceling incredibly good-looking games" news, the company has scuppered plans to publish its Xbox MMO, *True Fantasy Live Online*, in both Japan and the United States. The game, which was playable at last September's Tokyo Game Show, was conspicuous in its absence from E3 2004. In a statement, MS cited development's lack of progress as the cause. Level 5, the game's developer, continues to work on *Dragon Warrior VIII* for Square Enix and an unnamed project for Sony.

XB
PC
PS2
GBA
GC

SEG-AMMY?

COME TOGETHER, RIGHT NOW

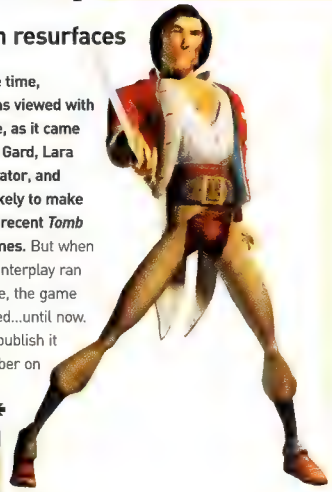
JAPAN

Last year's failed merger wasn't the end. Sammy and Sega have announced plans to come together under a new company, Sega-Sammy Holdings, in October. Sammy's plan to make profits off of low-cost arcade games using its Atomiswave hardware—which has essentially the same guts as Sega's dead Dreamcast console—is one obvious motivation for the joining of forces. The pairing will also create Japan's largest game publisher, bumping Konami off the top of the heap.

SEGA SAMMY HOLDINGS

[BLIPS]

Galleon resurfaces



At one time, *Galleon* was viewed with great hope, as it came from Toby Gard, Lara Croft's creator, and seemed likely to make up for the recent *Tomb Raider* games. But when publisher Interplay ran into trouble, the game disappeared...until now. Atlus will publish it in September on Xbox for $39.99.

GTA bombs

A Florida man, 27-year-old Anthony S. Jones, was arrested when his phone conversation with a coworker about in-game events in *Grand Theft Auto III* was misunderstood as a bomb threat. While talking on the phone, he was also warning another friend who was with him about a bomb in a building in *GTA*. This resulted in the evacuation of a restaurant—and felony charges for Jones.

GAMEPORT VITAL GAME INFO. NOW BOARDING...

ARRIVALS COMING SOON

SYSTEM	ETA	TITLE	HOW HOT?
GC	JULY	**TALES OF SYMPHONIA** The hills are alive with the sound of music.	
PS2	JULY	**KARAOKE REVOLUTION VOLUME 2** We know you can't sing, but buy it anyway.	
PS2	JULY	**STREET FIGHTER ANNIV. COLLECTION** Kill a weekend fighting it out old school.	
PS2	AUG	**HOT SHOTS GOLF FORE!** At least they can't use this pun again for 10 games.	
PS2	AUG	**STAR OCEAN: TILL THE END OF TIME** One more nice thing about the Square Enix merger	
PC	AUG	**WORLD OF WARCRAFT** Remember to get outside before this one hits.	
GBA	AUG	**ASTRO BOY** Between you and us, go for the GBA one.	
PS2	AUG	**PHANTOM BRAVE** More insanity from the *Disgaea* crew.	
PS2/XB	AUG	**HEADHUNTER: REDEMPTION** Not to be confused with *Pricehunter: Coupon Redemption*.	
GC/PS2	AUG	**MEGA MAN X: COMMAND MISSION** You know, the *Mega Man* stories are usually poor....	
GC/PS2/XB	AUG	**MADDEN NFL 2005** How many million this year, fellas?	
PS2/XB	AUG	**ESPN NFL 2005** If you can't beat 'em, hire Jamie Kennedy.	
GC	AUG	**PIKMIN 2** Gather your forces.	
PC	SEP	**HALF-LIFE 2** You try writing something funny about this one.	
GBA	SEP	**KINGDOM HEARTS: CHAIN OF MEMORIES** Flip back an issue for the skinny.	
GBA	SEP	**POKÉMON: LEAFGREEN/FIRERED** Fall in love all over again. Pikachuuuuuu!	

DEPARTURES OUT NOW

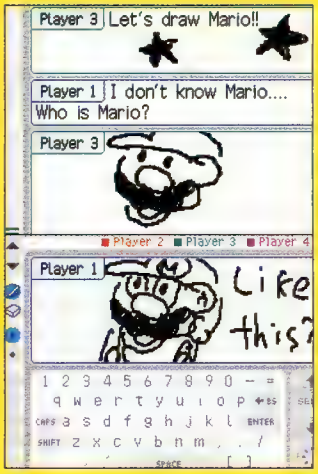
SYSTEM	TITLE	GMR SCORE
GC	**THE LEGEND OF ZELDA: FOUR SWORDS ADV.** We like to hook it up.	8/10
PS2	**LA PUCELLE: TACTICS** Freaks and geeks. We mean the characters, you know.	8/10
GC/PS2/XB	**SHREK 2: THE GAME** He got beat with the ugly joystick.	5/10
PC	**PAINKILLER** Take two and frag me in the morning.	8/10
XB	**METAL SLUG 3** Much better than *Garden Slug 3*.	8/10
GBA	**MARIO GOLF: ADVANCE TOUR** Eighteen holes, one pocket.	9/10
PC	**RISE OF NATIONS: THRONES & PATRIOTS** The History Channel has nothing on this.	8/10
XB	**MANHUNT** Boundary-pushing art or pretentious schlock? You decide! We did	4/10
XB	**RALLISPORT CHALLENGE 2** All the mud wrestling you need till *Rumble Roses*	9/10
GBA	**MARIO VS. DONKEY KONG** We're going to have to side with Mario here.	7/10
GC/PS2/XB	**FUTURE TACTICS: THE UPRISING** In the future, games cost $20.	6/10
PS2	**GALACTIC WRESTLING: FEAT. ULTIMATE MUSCLE** With my games, I like to have some cow, cow, cow!	5/10
PS2	**FRONT MISSION 4** Listen to L.A. actors badly stereotype European accents.	8/10
PS2	**UFC: SUDDEN IMPACT** More of an expected and unpleasantly lingering impact.	5/10
GBA	**SHINING FORCE** A prelude of what's to come, and that's the best thing about it.	7/10
PS2/XB	**RED DEAD REVOLVER** Let's play cowboys and semicompetent developers!	6/10


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SPECS:

Processor: 3D: ARM9, 2D: ARM7
Screen: Dual backlit 3-inch LCD
Media: DS compact card, GBA cartridge
Comm: Wireless 16-player local, 802.11b wi-fi
Input: D-pad, face and shoulder buttons, touch screen with stylus, headphone and microphone jacks



THE NINTENDO DS

IT'S COOLER THAN YOU THINK IT IS

U.S.A.

The time between the January announcement of the Nintendo DS and this year's E3 was filled with confusion for the press, developers, and Nintendo fans alike. "Two screens?" seemed to echo down the hallways of most gaming publications. Sarcastic remarks about "Virtual Boy 2" soon followed.

Now, Nintendo has finally taken the lid off its brand-new handheld system, and we've had time to get down and funky with the device. Though most of the software on display at E3 was incredibly early or even simply tech demos, we still were able to get a taste of what the DS is capable of—and what separates dual-screen gaming from the norm.

The Nintendo DS' two screens are each the size of a GBA screen. Using new backlight technology, they aren't washed out, unlike the GBA SP. Also rather unlike the GBA, the system can display full-on 3D—well enough, in fact, to nearly perfectly replicate *Mario 64*. It was playable at the show with only minor changes made.

Control is where the DS really shines. After years of fan complaints, the full load of SNES buttons makes it into a Nintendo handheld: a D-pad, four face buttons, and L and R shoulder buttons. These are recessed into the corners of the unit, offering something a little more tactile than the GBA SP.

More important is the addition of a Palm-style stylus pen, which allows you to access the system's touch screen. A demo called *PictoChat*, shown above right, allowed either hand-drawn or text-based instant messages to be transferred over the DS' built-in wireless link. Namco's *Pac-Pix* allowed players to draw Pac-Man and guide him in gobbling up ghosts.

What was conspicuously absent from the proceedings was a killer app that made it all make sense. While the innovations Nintendo has worked into the DS hardware are very promising, nothing screamed "Yes, *this* is the reason for the dual screens." GameCube is arguably still suffering from its lack of a truly spectacular original game at launch. Whether the DS will offer something more than a *Mario 64* rehash with multiplayer remains to be seen.

OOPS



When we predicted the look of the Nintendo DS in our April issue, we thought we were pretty clever. Turns out we were just a teensy-weensy bit on the wrong side. Nintendo's unit is much less aerodynamic than our svelte and stylish mock-up and is much wider. We admit it—we goofed. Still, ours did have two screens. Close enough, right?

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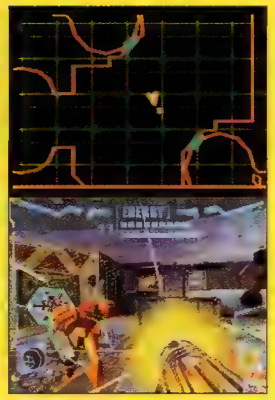
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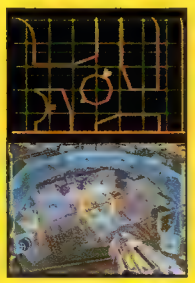






DS SNEAK PEEKS

METROID



Actually, the full title is *Metroid Prime: Hunters*. The DS twist, besides the map, is that you use the stylus to aim and shoot. While slightly put off by awkward controls, we dig the graphics, which do a great job of capturing that *Prime* feel. Hopefully it gets tightened up.

ANIMAL CROSSING DS



Talk about a killer app! The one thing that would have taken GC *Animal Crossing* from rad to absolutely perfect is online play, and the Nintendo DS supports wireless gaming. Just imagine: writing letters, stealing furniture...too bad Nintendo has yet to confirm *AC DS* is online.

MARIO 64X4



This version of *Mario 64* gets its title from the fact that Yoshi, Luigi, and Wario are added to the playable lineup. You can either participate in multiplayer battles or take 'em into the single-player game. At E3, it looked a little rougher than the original version but played great.

WARIOWARE INC. DS



This was perhaps the standout title for the DS at the show simply because it really showed off how using the stylus could lead to exciting gameplay. In fact, the stylus is the *only* way to play, and the minigames are all new. From drawing Japanese characters to rubbing coins, it rocked us.

THAT'S NOT ALL...



At left, you can see a screen of Nintendo's other Mario title, *New Super Mario Bros.*, which wasn't playable at E3. Other publishers are on board, too. Konami has *Yu-Gi-Oh! Nightmare Troubadour*, which has the best title and is the least promising of the announced titles. In licensed games, Activision is slinging *Spider-Man 2* while Bandai powers up *Gundam Seed*. Square Enix is preparing *Final Fantasy Crystal Chronicles* and more. Sonic is on his way as well. Even more games are in the works.

[PHONE HOME]

RE-N-GAGE

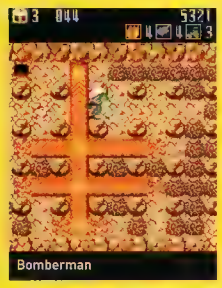


It's obvious to everyone that the N-Gage got off to a shaky start. This very magazine, in fact, trashed the original version of the device in the November 2003 issue, giving the unit a 3/10. (You can check out our review of the new N-Gage on page 94.)

The new unit supports what Nokia hilariously terms "classic talking" and what we call "looking like a relatively normal human being." There's also a cartridge slot on the outside, which allows you to switch games without completely dismantling the system.

But even more important are the games. N-Gage is finally attracting more publishers and presenting an array of original titles. Sega's *Pocket Kingdom* is a worldwide online multiplayer strategy game in the vein of its Saturn classic *Dragon Force*. Activision's immensely popular *Call of Duty* series is heading to the unit, while Hudson is bringing *Bomberman*. *The Elder Scrolls Travels: Shadowkey*, from Bethesda, is also in the works.

On that front, Nokia itself is working on a networked RPG based on the pen-and-paper *Rifts* series. *Pathway to Glory* will offer single-player and networked action/strategy in a World War II setting. Nokia cooking up more games means actual reasons to buy an N-Gage. Isn't logic fun?


Bomberman


Call of Duty


Shadowkey



Pocket Kingdom

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SPECS:

Processor: Dual 333MHz MIPS R4000
Screen: 4.5 inch, 16:9 widescreen backlit LCD
Media: UMD 1.8 GB disc, Memory Stick Pro Duo
Comm: USB 2.0, 802.11b wi-fi
Input: D-pad, face and shoulder buttons, analog stick, headphone and microphone jacks

THE SONY PSP

BIG, BEAUTIFUL SCREEN AND GUARANTEED GAMES. YES!

U.S.A.

The one thing Game Boy has lacked during its 15-year reign has been a serious competitor. Only Sega in its hardware heyday provided a challenge to the throne with its Game Gear system, which was never followed up. As Nintendo's Reggie Fils-Aime proclaimed at E3: "Nine have tried. Nine have failed." It's blunt but essentially correct.

However, after E3, it has become apparent that as with PlayStation and PlayStation 2, there is approximately a zero-percent chance that the PSP will fail. Sony has forged strong ties with publishers, evidenced by Electronic Arts Worldwide Studios President Don Mattrick joining Sony during the PSP portion of its E3 press conference to pledge at least four launch titles. Everyone remembers the bumpy road of the PS2's launch; nobody can deny the system's current success. It appears PSP's ride will be slightly smoother.

Yes, only slightly. At the show, a surprising dearth of playable titles was available for a system that's coming out in Japan during this calendar year. Only Namco's *T.O.E.* was playable on the show floor. You may remember this game as *Tales of Destiny II*, which hit the U.S. PlayStation in 2001. The only playable PSP game was not even a new one. Looping video demos of dozens of games were running in Sony's booth, but even behind closed doors, the PSP wasn't truly switched on.

But even a port of a 3-year-old 2D PS1 game successfully illustrates the most immediately impressive feature of the PSP: its huge and gorgeous screen. Nintendo went from tiny to small in the transition from GBC to GBA; Sony is upping the ante considerably, and the clarity and size of the PSP's display is absolutely fantastic.

Controls will be very familiar to those who have used a PlayStation controller (i.e., everyone). Well, the D-pad and face buttons will be, anyway—the analog stick is small and very close to the unit, offering maneuverability while minimizing breakability. It's unusual, as are the system's form-over-function L and R buttons, which are metal strips overlaid on clear plastic.

With almost a surfeit of developers interested in the unit, the PSP can't have anything but an immense software lineup. With capabilities closer to PS2 than PS1, Sony will corner the market on high-tech handheld games. And with the PSP's capacity to play movies and music (see sidebar on next page), it will cater to more than one facet of your lifestyle. PSP is a sleek success in the making.

OOPS 2

This time, it's Sony that goofed. Last year, the company released a preliminary design for the PSP that had gamers scratching their heads. The unit seemed to feature touch-sensitive iPod-style pads instead of true buttons, and no analog stick was in sight. Or maybe no D-pad. Who can tell what that thing to the left of the screen really is, anyway? Fortunately, the final unit features familiar and comfortable controls, unlike the ones pictured below.





A Perilous Quest...

for Adventure and Survival.

In a dying world called Sylvarant, legend has it that one day a Chosen One will appear from amongst the people and the land will be reborn. After a fierce attack by a mysterious race leaves their town in ruin, the Chosen One and her friends set out on a perilous journey to unlock the seals between two interlocked worlds and restore the mana that flows between them.

Tales of Symphonia features one of the fiercest, most action-packed battle systems ever created. An exclusive real-time combat engine puts you in full control of your characters to wage war using hundreds of special attacks, spells, and combos. Experience this epic adventure with lush 3D scaling and custom anime cut scenes by renowned artist Kosuke Fujishima.

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METAL GEAR ACID







One of the most exciting PSP games at the show was Konami's *Metal Gear Acid*, an unusual spin-off from an equally unusual series. While *Metal Gear* creator Hideo Kojima didn't have anything much to say about the game during the show, preferring to concentrate on boosting his upcoming *Metal Gear Solid 3: Snake Eater*, Sony's video presentation revealed that the game blends collectible card and strategy elements into the *Metal Gear* mix we know and love. No, really.



GAMES, GAMES, GAMES



While almost no PSP games were playable at the show, Sony showed off dozens in one form or another. Electronic Arts has *NFL Street, NBA Street, Need for Speed Underground,* and *Tiger Woods* just for starters. Namco is reinvigorating the moribund *Ridge Racer* series with a new title. Koei will flood the PSP with *Dynasty Warriors* titles starting in 2005. Nippon Ichi, creator of *Disgaea*, has the all-new *Makai Wars*. *Tony Hawk's Underground* and *Spider-Man 2* are on board from Activision. This is just the tip of the iceberg.

[WATCH ME]

SHINY DISCS

Sony's Ken Kutaragi, the designer of the original PlayStation, says he expects the PSP to be "the Walkman of the 21st century." Of course, he doesn't just mean that in the sense of a portable music-playing device, but instead as a compact digital-content delivery system.

The PSP and its high-capacity UMD discs will offer more than games. Square Enix has pledged to release its upcoming *Final Fantasy VII: Advent Children* CGI movie on the device. The PSP's movie-theater-style 16:9 screen delivers exceptionally clear images perfectly suited to portable video. Sony's movie arm, which is responsible for the *Spider-Man* films, has naturally signed up as well.

You can expect music, too. Sony displayed the PSP playing music videos from a number of artists, including Beyoncé, Aerosmith, and *GMR* favorite Franz Ferdinand. While it's less clear whether audio-only discs or enhanced multimedia products will be offered, it's obvious that all of Sony's divisions are getting behind the PSP in a big way.



OPINIONS

GMR CHATS ABOUT DS AND PSP

Christian: It's hard to decide which system is more exciting. On one hand, the DS is something truly new. On the other, the PSP totally rocks out specs-wise. Since the DS didn't have any truly great games at the show, I'm not completely convinced. The PSP had even less in the way of playable software...but Sony has never really had a problem there.

Tom: When we first heard about the DS, I remember commenting that this is what you get when you have a development guy—Mr. Iwata—as the head of the company. They like gadgets, even unmarketable ones.

That said, the DS was one of the best things I saw at E3. True, everything they showed was pretty much a tech demo, but—holy crap—the potential is just awesome. If someone figures out what to do with that thing, watch out.

The PSP? It's everything I thought it would be, no surprises there. I don't mean to downplay its impact—in fact, the PSP is one of the most significant gaming developments in years. Now, if Square can make a good RPG for it, the universe will truly be complete.

Milkman: I realize that the PSP has the potential to become a new standard in portable entertainment, but besides the fact that it's basically a handheld PS2, it's a pretty basic piece of gear.

The DS, on the other hand, may not be as sexy as the PSP, but the upside is tremendous. You know Nintendo wouldn't go through this much trouble to shift the paradigms of game design and not implement these changes into its next console. Consider the DS a blueprint for the future. The problem lies in who makes use of the second screen as more than just a menu.

Andrew: From a purely conceptual standpoint, I'm far more excited about what the DS might do in the hands of creative and competent developers. Here's hoping that publishers will be willing to let their development teams take risks on the system.

As much as I love the PSP's big, beautiful screen, I'm not especially keen on playing portable versions of PS2 games I already have. I'd rather buy an iPod for music, and there's no way I'm buying both a DVD and a UMD of a single movie.

My main question to both companies has to do with market share—not just with the handhelds, but also the home consoles. Are there really enough people out there willing to spend this kind of money on yet another system and its library of games?

What do you think of DS and PSP? Write to us: gmr@ziffdavis.com.


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MARK MACDONALD

BUZZ SAW

Much of the buzz at this year's E3, especially among developers, was about the bold innovations of Nintendo's new DS handheld. I'd say that's only half right: Nintendo's booth was indeed home to the most refreshing new game ideas at the show, but they were on the Cube.

Take *Donkey Kong: Jungle Beat*. A side-scrolling platformer that uses bongo drums as a controller may sound gimmicky, but try it once and you'll be hooked. The sensation of beating on the drums as your hairy onscreen alter ego pummels a giant pig is something you must experience for yourself.

Or how about *Odama*—again, on paper, it sounds ridiculous. Ancient Japanese military strategy meets... pinball? Yes, it's weird as hell, and yes, it's glorious. Guiding a giant iron ball around to crush your enemies, topple their towers, and destroy their camps while your troops charge into battle somehow just makes sense.

As much as I often complain about Nintendo ignoring what the rest of the industry is doing, in the sea of *Grand Theft Auto* clones and WWII-themed FPSes that was E3, it was great to see them marching to the beat of their own (bongo) drum. Now if only they'd apply a bit of that original thinking to the next *Pokémon*....

Mark MacDonald is executive editor of Electronic Gaming Monthly.

[TALENT]

AKARI UCHIDA
MUD-WRESTLING MASTERMIND

One of the funniest games at E3 was Konami's *Rumble Roses*, a wrestling game featuring barely dressed females performing scandalous attacks on one another. We sat down with the game's producer, Akari Uchida, with one simple question on our lips: Why?

GMR: Where in the world did the inspiration to make an all-female wrestling game come from?

AU: Walking down the street, all of a sudden you say, "God's will."

When we create games, we have to present them to a panel within our company, so I said, "How do I get them to approve a project?" And I decided: high-polygon models of girl characters. So I went to the board and they said OK! [laughs]

GMR: How did the team come up with the costumes?

AU: We certainly went after caricatures, initially. So, for example, with Dixie we wanted to make the all-American girl, an American cowgirl. So, it's just like Texas—perfect. [laughs]

GMR: What kind of gameplay modes can we expect?

AU: We want to allow players to stick to their own play style. If you want to be a superstar, be a real hero—it allows you to do that, and the system will back you up by giving you other reasons to do that.

Yes, you're [the player], but we also want you to be the star of this game. We want to get to the point where it's like when your character is getting beat up, we want you to feel that shame as well and get back at your opponent. That's one of the reasons for the humiliation mode.

GMR: Humiliation mode?

AU: For example, when your opponent puts an embarrassing move on you, your humiliation points go up. When your humiliation goes to maximum, you become embarrassed. Then you've got to put an even more embarrassing move on them. You can get a humiliation KO that way.

GMR: How will the audience play out in a match?

AU: Hmm, top secret. Working on it. [smiles]

GMR: Can we expect other environments besides the wrestling ring and beach?

AU: Yes, there are going to be a few more areas to wrestle in, but it's about the wrestling itself, so we're not too worried about the specific locales. And the mud-match part [was added] because the American staff at Konami was like, "Yeah, we want it, we want it, we want it!" [laughs] We're just like, "Yeah, what is it about Americans that makes them like mud wrestling so much?"

GMR: Are you at all afraid of offending the female gamers of the world?

AU: I don't think there are going to be any [offended girl gamers]. They're girls, but we've made them beautiful and strong. They stand up for themselves, they go out and get business done. We wanted them to be sexy and strong, not skanky.



PLAYSTATION
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JOHN DAVISON

SE-QUIL

No one makes just a game anymore. Everything has to be a franchise. These days, games come with a commitment of at least two more episodes, whether we want them or not. Capcom, for example, says we're now going to be treated to a slew of sequels *every frickin' year*.

No sooner had we all discovered that *Resident Evil Outbreak* is a half-assed mishmash of ideas did Capcom announce *Outbreak 2*. Great. Why? The last one didn't deserve a sequel. Are we just going to see series thrown at the wall repeatedly until something sticks? In the old days, only good games and big games deserved sequels. These days, nothing seems to matter.

Rockstar was talking about what was going to be in the next two sequels to *Red Dead Revolver* before the first one had even been sent out for review. It's not a bad game, but what does it matter? *Red Dead Revolver 2* is going to have celebrity voice talent.

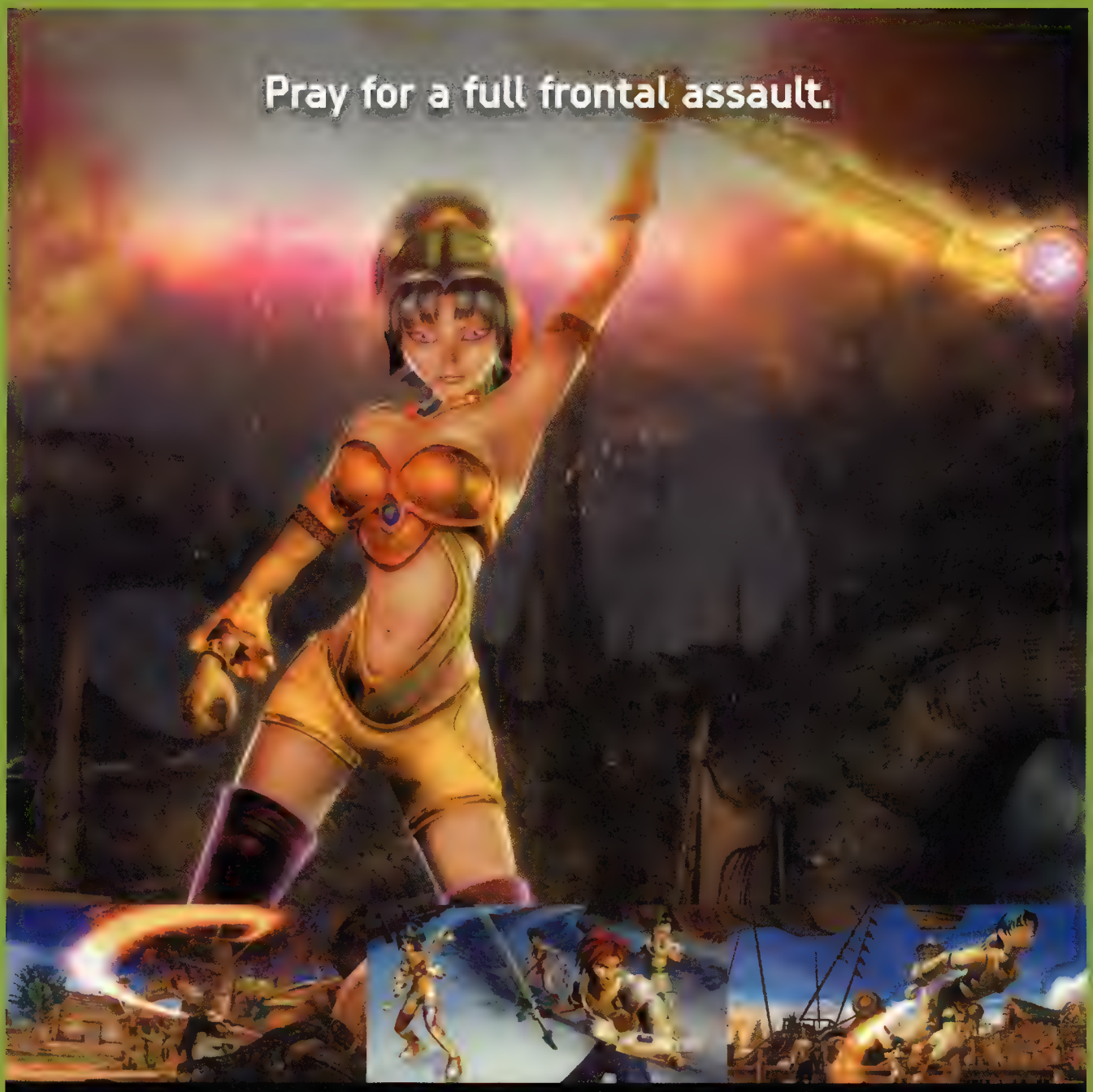
There will be 220 games released on PS2 alone this year, half of them no doubt with the promise that the good ideas will be in the sequel. If all those ideas were funneled into current games, perhaps we'd see a higher percentage of individual games actually meeting their potential.

John Davison is editor-in-chief of the Official U.S. PlayStation Magazine.

PS2

GC

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PC
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JEFF GREEN

I LOVE E3

Astute readers of this fine publication may recall that just last month, my column here was titled "I Hate E3." So, OK—I'm wishy-washy. Sue me.

The reason I now love E3 is that it's over. Last month, I hadn't gone yet, and all the hype was making me sick. But now, I'm happy to report that the show was pretty cool after all, with a big boatload of great-looking PC games.

Half-Life 2, of course, looked as stunning as always. Those who naysay the game now, saying it can't live up to expectations, just don't know their history. *Half-Life* didn't just defy expectations—it blew them out of the water, changing PC gaming forever. Valve is a fearsomely talented company. Yes, it blew the PR on this one, but that's totally separate from the game itself, which I have no doubt is going to rule all over again.

But that's obvious. The biggest surprise at E3 was NCsoft, a company no one even heard of a year ago, but which triumphed with a killer lineup of online games, including *City of Heroes* (and the *Villains* expansion—yay!), *Guild Wars*, *Auto Assault*, and Richard Garriott's *Tabula Rasa*—which all showed genuine creativity and originality in a genre struggling with those very issues. Didn't anyone tell NCsoft that the PC is dead? No? Thank goodness.

XB
PC
PS2
GBA
GC

GMR CHARTS

IN ASSOCIATION WITH EB GAMES electronics boutique

TOP-SELLING GAMES FOR EVERY SYSTEM FOR MAY 04

TOP 10 ALL FORMATS

RANK	TITLE	FORMAT	SCORE
01	**RED DEAD REVOLVER** Shootout at the "no better than OK" corral.	PS2	6
02	**RED DEAD REVOLVER** If this is a Western, is *Samurai Warriors* an Eastern?	XB	6
03	**CITY OF HEROES** The superhero renaissance continues.	PC	8
04	**SAMURAI WARRIORS** Lots of people like to wave around pointy sticks.	PS2	7
05	**TRANSFORMERS** Soon to be transforming into store credit.	PS2	5
06	**ONIMUSHA 3: DEMON SIEGE** It's an international incident.	PS2	9
07	**FIGHT NIGHT 2004** Keeps on swingin'.	PS2	9
08	**NBA BALLERS** Apparently, you all wanna be ballers.	PS2	8
09	**SYPHON FILTER: THE OMEGA STRAIN** Gotta play something till the next *SOCOM*.	PS2	5
10	**RALLISPORT CHALLENGE 2** Barely edged out *La Pucelle*. Really.	XB	9

*Denotes equivalent score by sister publication, *Computer Gaming World*.
NR=Not Reviewed.

PS2 TOP 10

01	RED DEAD REVOLVER	6
02	SAMURAI WARRIORS	7
03	TRANSFORMERS	5
04	ONIMUSHA 3: DEMON SIEGE	9
05	FIGHT NIGHT 2004	9
06	NBA BALLERS	8
07	SYPHON FILTER: THE OMEGA STRAIN	5
08	LA PUCELLE: TACTICS	8
09	MVP BASEBALL 2004	9
10	HITMAN: CONTRACTS	6

XBOX TOP 10

01	RED DEAD REVOLVER	6
02	RALLISPORT CHALLENGE 2	9
03	THIEF: DEADLY SHADOWS	8
04	FIGHT NIGHT 2004	9
05	VAN HELSING	NR
06	HALO	10
07	SPLINTER CELL PANDORA TOMORROW	9
08	HITMAN: CONTRACTS	6
09	NBA BALLERS	8
10	TOCA RACE DRIVER 2	8

PC TOP 10

01	CITY OF HEROES	8
02	THIEF: DEADLY SHADOWS	8
03	FAR CRY	7
04	LINEAGE II	TBD
05	BATTLEFIELD VIETNAM	9
06	RISE OF NATIONS: THRONES & PATRIOTS	8
07	FINAL FANTASY XI	9
08	SACRED	7*
09	UNREAL TOURNAMENT 2004	8
10	RISE OF NATIONS	8

GBA TOP 10

01	MARIO VS. DONKEY KONG	7
02	SHREK 2	NR
03	SUPER MARIO ADVANCE 4: SUPER MARIO BROS. 3	9
04	METROID: ZERO MISSION	9
05	RIVER CITY RANSOM EX	TBD
06	SONIC ADVANCE 3	8
07	MEGA MAN BATTLE NETWORK 3: BLUE	8
08	POKEMON SAPPHIRE	7
09	MARIO & LUIGI: SUPERSTAR SAGA	9
10	MEGA MAN BATTLE NETWORK 3: WHITE	8

GC TOP 10

01	CUSTOM ROBO	8
02	SHREK 2	5
03	POKÉMON COLOSSEUM	8
04	HARVEST MOON: A WONDERFUL LIFE	8
05	SONIC MEGA COLLECTION	7
06	SUPER SMASH BROS. MELEE	9
07	MARIO KART: DOUBLE DASH!!	10
08	NBA STREET VOL. 2	9
09	MVP BASEBALL 2004	9
10	WARIOWARE INC.: MEGA PARTY GAMES	8

SYMPHONIC JOY

FINAL FANTASY CONCERT WOWS U.S.A.

Moments of culture and quiet civility are few and far between during the week of E3; had it not been for Nobuo Uematsu and the Los Angeles Philharmonic, the only sounds worth remembering would be the usual klaxons and explosions. Hundreds of *Final Fantasy* aficionados, some forking over big money for the privilege, filled the acoustically pristine Walt Disney Concert Hall in downtown L.A. on May 10 for Dear Friends, the first videogame concert ever held in North America.

The 14-song set list included favorites such as "Liberi Fatali" from *FFVIII* (a powerful opener, to be sure), the heartbreaking "Aeris' Theme" from *FFVII*, and the concert's namesake from *FFV*, "Dear Friends." The unannounced encore of *FFVII*'s "One-Winged Angel" concluded the program. Although no concrete plans have been announced, Uematsu has said that he wants to take Dear Friends on the road...start saving your gil now.



XBOX
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EVAN SHAMOON

FPS BLOWOUT

E3 has come and gone, and if nothing else, one thing is certain: Xbox is up to its black plastic ass in first-person shooters. And while it's easy to be cynical about the sheer overload, most of them actually look quite good. Allow me to recap.

Aside from the recently released (and brilliant) *The Chronicles of Riddick*, E3 provided the first public viewing of an avalanche of first-person shooting. *Doom 3* was on display, looking scary as hell and sporting an Xbox-only cooperative Xbox Live mode to boot. *Far Cry: Instincts* looks to be on its way to becoming a superb reworking of the PC hit, and *Conker: Live & Reloaded* surprised even the most jaded Rare haters with its frenetic multiplayer.

The military line was also well tapped, with *Rainbow Six 3: Black Arrow*, *Ghost Recon 2*, *Men of Valor*, and *Brothers in Arms* all looking to provide hearty doses of lovable armed conflict.

EA's *GoldenEye 2* will include Xbox Live support, while *Unreal Championship 2* looks to be a tremendous leap past the original, employing a surprisingly polished hand-to-hand combat element. Micro Forté's *Citizen Zero* even brings the FPS into the realm of massively multiplayer. And then there's *Halo 2*.

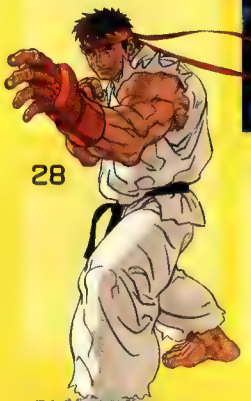
Now let's just hope that by the time virtual reality truly arrives, we've figured out something to do from the first-person perspective besides shoot each other in the face.

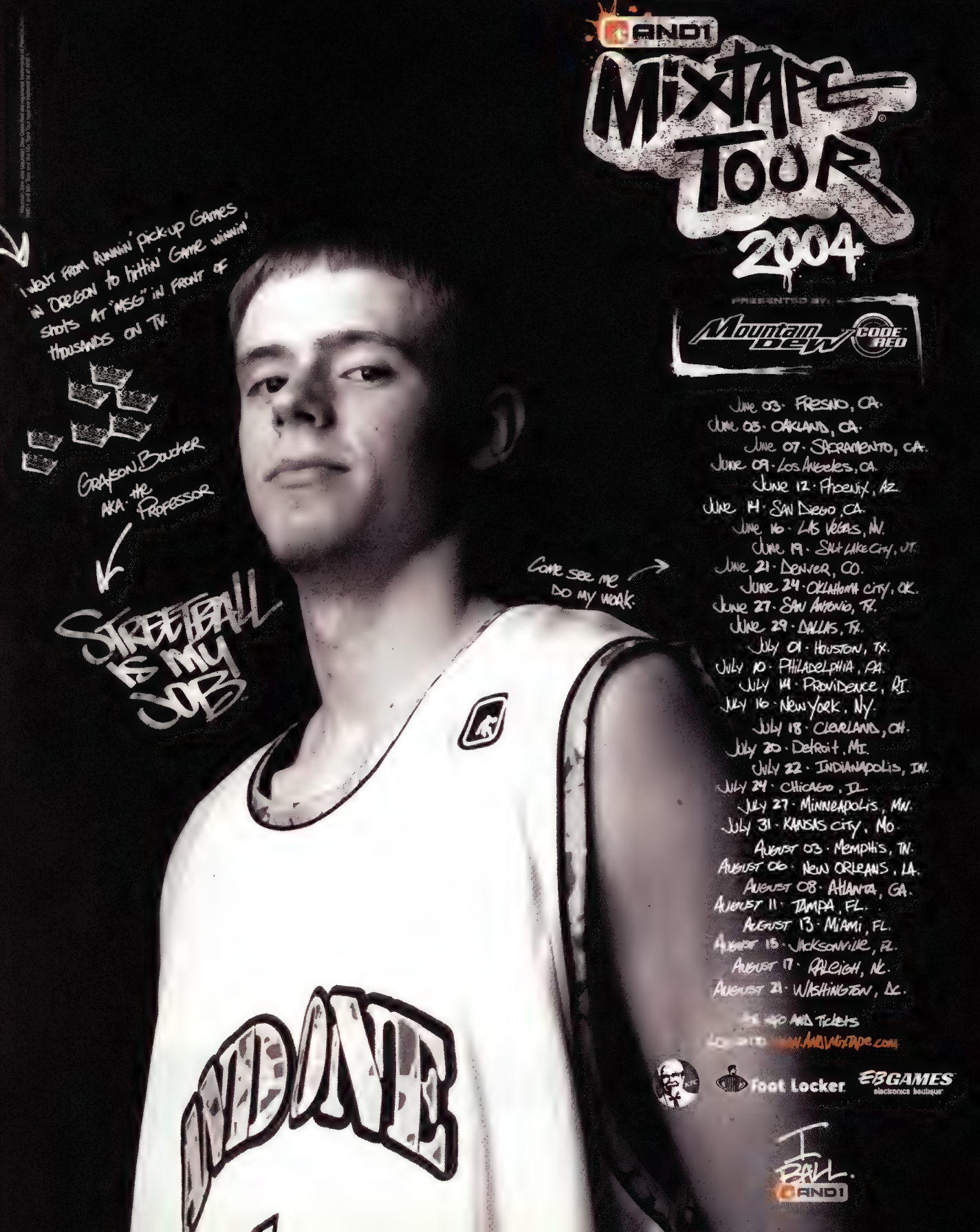


GAMEPLANNER | JULY 2004

ALL RELEASE DATES ARE SUBJECT TO CHANGE. SO IT'S NOT OUR FAULT!

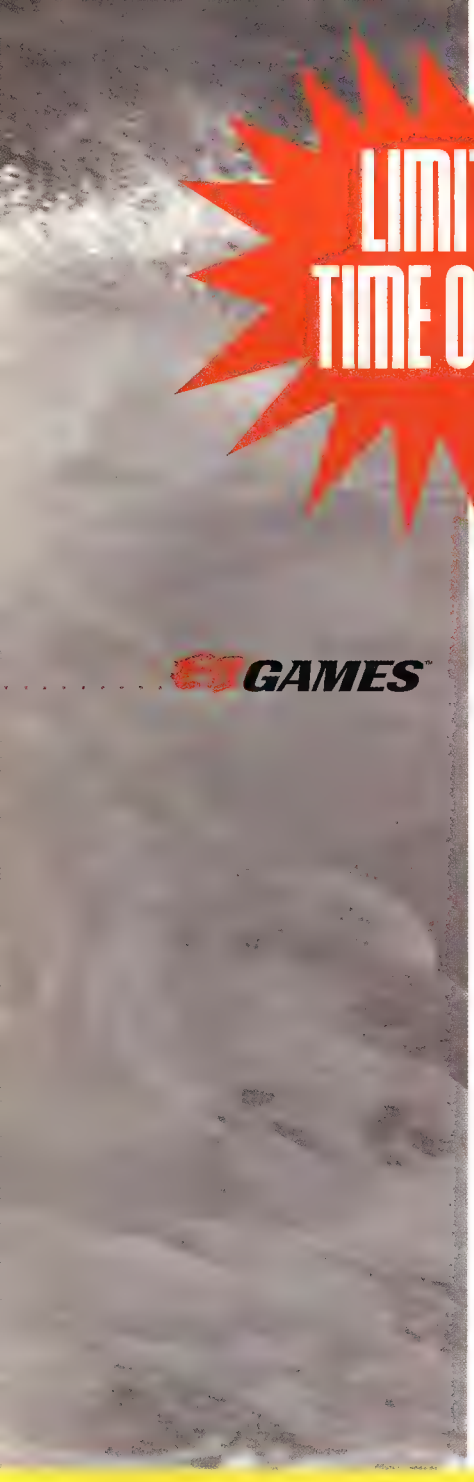
COMMUNISM? ON THE FOURTH OF JULY? NOT IN MY COUNTRY, PAL

SUNDAY	MONDAY	TUESDAY	WEDNESDAY	THURSDAY	FRIDAY	SATURDAY
	Only two more weeks before the back-to-school sales begin. Hey, don't blame us. We just want you to be ready for it.			01 Today is the birthday of the Chinese Communist Party. If you already knew that, then you yourself are probably a communist. Please turn yourself in to the local authorities ASAP.	02 *Spider-Man, Spider-Man* earns $300 million plus the international take and cable TV royalties, just like a spider can. *Spider-Man 2* opened June 30; avoid the lines and go tonight.	03 
04 Be patriotic today. The Patriot Act demands it. The Patriot Squads will be out in full force, so make sure you have your miniature American flag in clear view.	05 	06 *Splinter Cell Pandora Tomorrow* for GameCube sneaks its way back into a July release.	07	08 If you woke up this morning and thought to yourself, "You know, self, I'd really like to buy a new PC game today," then your only option is *Aura: Fate of the Ages*. Go self!	09 When we said that *Starsky & Hutch* would be the best movie of the year, we were actually mispronouncing "*Anchorman*." *Anchorman* will be the best movie of the year.	10 
11	12 Shipping today: *Athens 2004* (PS2), *Crimson Tears* (PS2), *Tales of Symphonia* (GC), *Combat Elite* (PS2), *Samurai Warriors* (XB), and *NCAA Football 2005* (GC, PS2, XB).	13 Claims that the Darkness exist solely as a marketing tool of the karaoke industry are more believable today: *Karaoke Revolution Vol. 2* is out. We believe in a thing called ROCK	14 	15	16 *I, Robot* opens today. Considering that it doesn't stick to the Asimov book and there's an outside chance Will Smith will rap, *I, Couldn't Care Less*.	17 
18 If today happens to be your birthday, well then, happy birthday...you!	19	20 *Puyo Pop Fever* is out for GC, *Growlanser: Generations* is out for PS2, and *Catwoman* is out for every single system under the sun.	21 	22 	23 The reason we say EA's *Catwoman* game will likely be better than the movie is because the movie looks *so unbearably awful*. But hey, if you like bad movies, the gettin's good.	24
25 	26 Only one release today, and it's a weird one: *Hamtaro Ham-Ham Games* for GBA. It's by the same guys who did *Mario & Luigi*, so it can't be all bad.	27 Ryu vs. Ken, all over again. *Street Fighter Anniversary* is out for PS2. It includes *Hyper Street Fighter II* and *Street Fighter III: Third Strike*. Yeah, you want it. You want it *bad*.	28	29	30 While we realize his name is actually "Shyamalan," we can't help but say, "M. Night Shama-lama-ding-dong." Mr. Ding-Dong's new movie, *The Village*, opens today.	31 


AND1
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JUNE 12 · PHOENIX, AZ.
JUNE 14 · SAN DIEGO, CA.
JUNE 16 · LAS VEGAS, NV.
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JUNE 21 · DENVER, CO.
JUNE 24 · OKLAHOMA CITY, OK.
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JUNE 29 · DALLAS, TX.
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JULY 14 · PROVIDENCE, RI.
JULY 16 · NEW YORK, NY.
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JULY 22 · INDIANAPOLIS, IN.
JULY 24 · CHICAGO, IL.
JULY 27 · MINNEAPOLIS, MN.
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NEXT

BEST OF SHOW

THE WATER'S FINE. COME ON IN

The Electronic Entertainment Expo comes but once a year and is practically a weeklong legal holiday in the eyes of gamers. To us, it's just a lot of walking around, but our spirit remains unbroken! In this very special edition of NEXT, we present to you the highlights of what we saw at this annual collision of sight and sound. Naturally, there are way too many games to list in one month, and dozens of great titles didn't make the list due to space limitations. But that's a perfect reason to check back in the following months, when we dig deeper into what will undoubtedly be a jam-packed holiday season. But for now, we offer a taste—a taste of what's to come and what you'll be playing in the not-so-distant future. Enjoy.

ACTION: PURE ACTION

Believe it—action games are a core market in the gaming industry, and each generation finds more complex ways to blow your feeble mind. What's coming down the pipe should convince even cynics that games will soon eclipse the movie industry, offering players a visceral experience those noninteractive films can't provide.

PRINCE OF PERSIA 2

OLDER, WISER AND DEADLIER

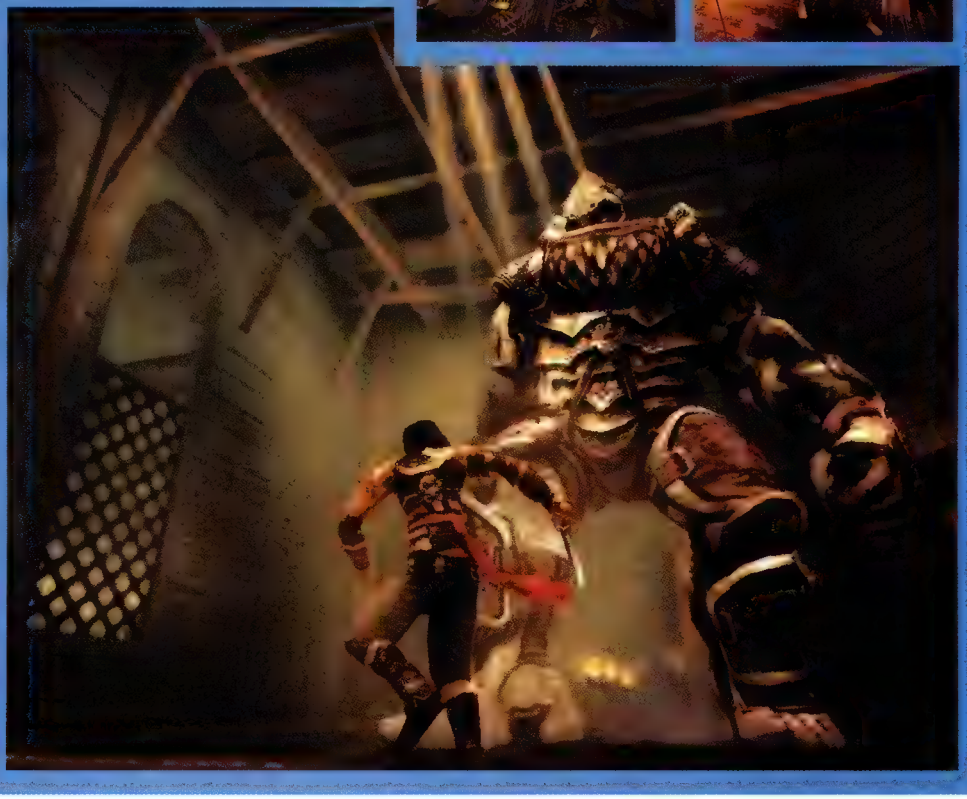
☐SYS PS2/XB ☐PUB UBISOFT ☐DEV UBISOFT MONTREAL ☐REL OCTOBER





It was only yesterday that the Prince was running up walls, gleefully leaping from column to column. Now our Prince is a doomed character with fate hunting him down for some undisclosed discretion.

But this isn't fate in a metaphysical sense. Fate has manifested itself as a beast, and that can't be good. Outside of that, *POP2* will have real bosses this time. Some of the confrontations in *Sands of Time* were "bosslike" but not as dramatic as they could have been. The upcoming game has one large boss who towers roughly 12 feet over the Prince. The Prince slashes the tendon of his gigantic heel, which forces him to drop to his knee in pain. And with the lightning reflexes we know him for, the Prince runs up the boss' back, grabs a hold of his neck, and stabs him in the back of the head. Badass!





VIEWTIFUL JOE 2

ABSOLUTELY VIEWTIFUL

☐SYS GC/PS2 PUB CAPCOM ☐DEV CLOVER STUDIO ☐REL WINTER

You may think you know Joe, but you don't know jack. The red-fitted dynamo is back, and he has his No. 1 woman right beside him—enter Sylvia. You can play as either Sylvia or Joe in the new co-op mode from the outset! Joe will kick viewtiful butt times two this winter, with new attacks, enemies, and locales planned for this highly anticipated sequel. OK, explode now.



RATCHET & CLANK: UP YOUR ARSENAL

ARE THEY TALKING ABOUT MY A$$?

☐SYS PS2 ☐PUB SONY COMPUTER ENTERTAINMENT ☐DEV INSOMNIAC ☐REL NOVEMBER

There is something about a bipedal cat and his small but courageous robot that just doesn't get tiresome. Everyone knows *Ratchet & Clank* promises a liberal helping of gadgets and mayhem, but who could have expected multiplayer? The next chapter offers offline and online multiplayer modes and co-op vehicles, pushing the puzzle-solving and platforming madness to demented levels. Plus, expect more wacky gadgets with Insomniac at the helm.

STEALTH

Stealth is a peculiar category right now—it's big enough to be considered its own genre but still not very crowded. This year, Konami's *Metal Gear Solid* finally faces off against the up-and-coming *Splinter Cell*, and with *Pandora Tomorrow* winning rave reviews, it looks like Sam Fisher has momentum on his side.

STARCRAFT: GHOST

GHOST IN THE MACHINE

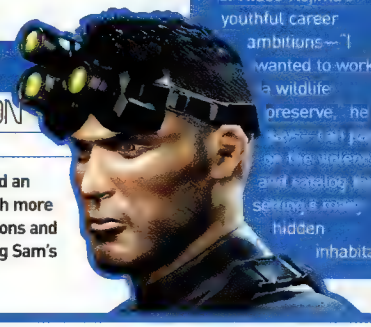
SYS GC/PS2/XB PUB VIVENDI DEV NIHILISTIC REL WINTER

Designer James Goddard (late of the Collective) calls his ideal balance for *Ghost* "in-your-face stealth," mixing the Ghost's sneaky cloaking abilities with enough violence to keep things hopping. Meanwhile, despite spots of iffy animation, the *StarCraft* universe looks beautiful in 3D, and the smaller single-unit scale offers a fascinating new perspective on it.

SPLINTER CELL 3

NO-NONSENSE ESPIONAGE ACTION

SYS GC/PS2 PUB UBISOFT DEV UBISOFT MONTREAL REL 2004



E3's early PC demo showed off unbelievable graphics and an intense two-player cooperative campaign mode. It's much more open-ended than the first *SC*, and while it has many more weapons and opportunities for action-oriented mayhem, the rewards for using Sam's new stealth kills and acrobatic moves are much greater.

METAL GEAR SOLID 3

SOLID SNAKE SUNNY-SIDE UP

SYS PS2 PUB KONAMI DEV KONAMI JAPAN REL WINTER

In 1964, Big Boss went to war in the Russian forests, and whatever happened there set the entire *Metal Gear* saga in motion. *MGS3*'s E3 2004 demonstration revealed a complex story, as Solid Snake's predecessor encountered the crew of Russian madmen behind the creation of the very first Metal Gear.

The playable *Snake Eater* demo had every weapon in the game (including the tranquilizer pistol, the Dragunov sniper rifle, the RPG-7 rocket launcher, and the new shotgun) making it hard to be stealthy with all that firepower on tap. The jungle environment definitely puts a new spin on things, though, from little details (Snake can sink in quicksand now) to the bigger picture of dealing with a more complex, more interactive, less linear environment.



Pacifists who share one of Hideo Kojima's youthful career ambitions—"I wanted to work in a wildlife preserve, he says—can pull on the violence and catalog the setting's more hidden inhabitants.

SHOOTER

"Shooter" describes some pretty different games now, even leaving out the first-person variety. But they all have one thing in common—stuff gets blown up real good.

GRADIUS V

AS GOOD AS GRADIUS GETS

SYS PS2 PUB KONAMI DEV TREASURE REL SEPTEMBER

Though the finished *Gradius V* is arriving about eight months late, it's worth that wait and more. The new option control system finally makes sense—holding R1 tweaks the positioning of four basic option setups on the fly, whether to widen a wing formation or spin four orbiting options—and two-player simultaneous shooting livens up the already beautiful stages.

GUNGRIFFON

EVERYTHING OLD IS NEW AGAIN

SYS XB PUB TECMO DEV GAME ARTS/KAMA DIGITAL REL FALL



The Saturn-born mecha shooter series has a new lease on life due to its 12-player Xbox Live battles. Producer Masato Dobashi promises a fast-moving game in the classic *GunGriffon* style, plus 20 basic robot chassis to customize for specialized purposes. Teamwork is the name of the game.

STARFOX

TAKE OFF WITH FOX'S NEW ARMADA

SYS GC PUB NINTENDO DEV NAMCO REL NOVEMBER



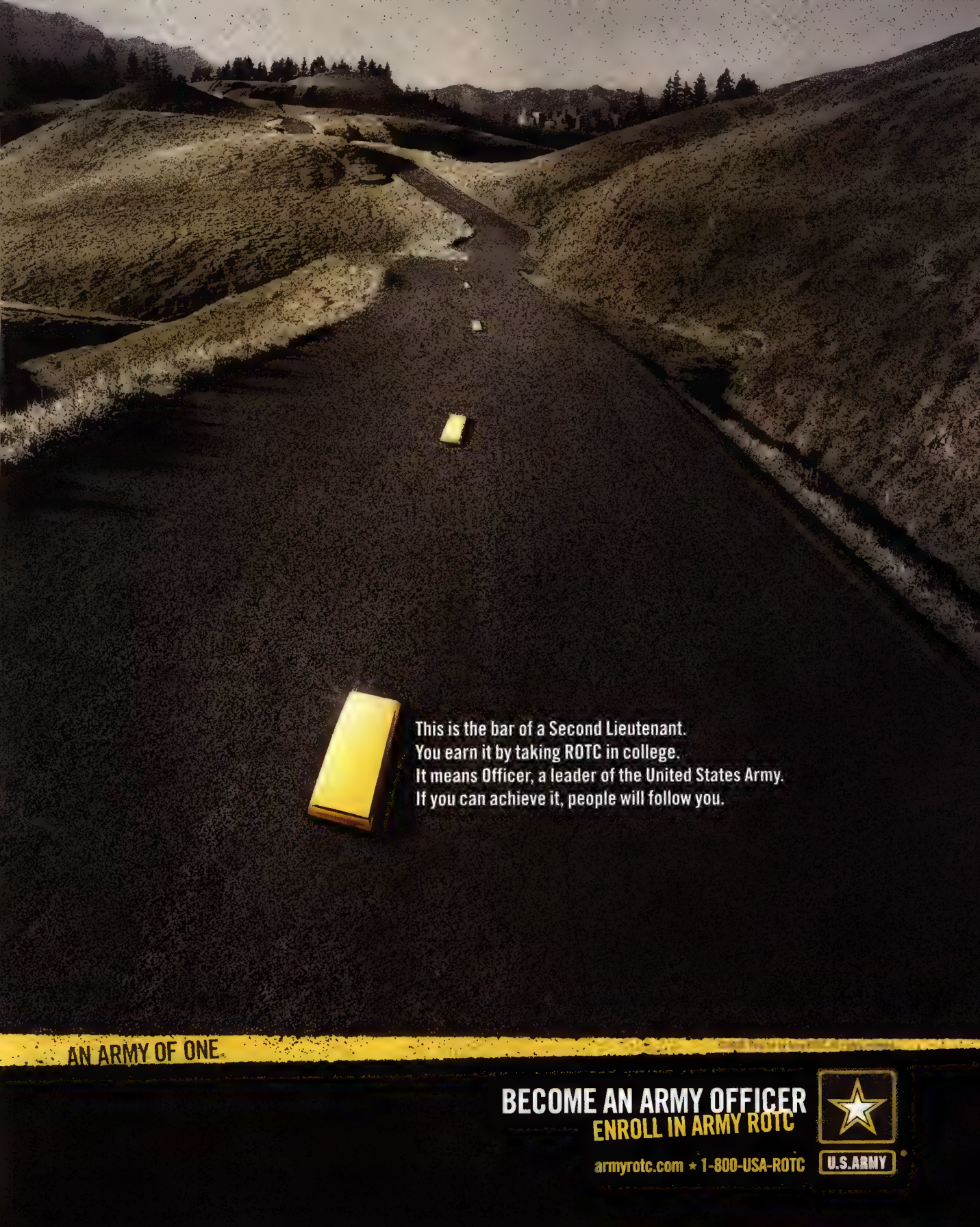
At worst, Namco's *Star Fox* revival will reflect last year's *Rebel Strike*, a sweet space shooter with some slightly iffy ground-based sections. At best, who knows? The main thing to keep in mind is that this year's *Star Fox* demo completely destroys the nightmare shown at E3 2003.

The ground-based stage on display had its good points, particularly the sight of commanding Fox's new battle tank, but repetitive enemies and gaps in the level design showed that this half of the game still needs work. The space battle stage, though, merits the game's original title, *Star Fox Armada*. Squadrons of fighters storm around massive battleships in levels that have an amazing sense of scale. Some things never change—the Arwing fighter is still armed with a simple charge beam and smart bomb, and Slippy Toad still needs to be rescued every 30 seconds—but the total package is a fine next-generation evolution of past *Star Fox* games.

XB

PS2

GC


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ACTION

FIRST-PERSON SHOOTER

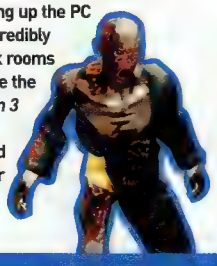
There's so much happening on the FPS scene these days that one page is barely enough to contain it all. While thousands are enjoying *UT2004* and cursing *Far Cry*, the four cornerstones of the genre have sequels nearing their release dates: *Halo*, *Doom*, *Metroid*, and (finally) *Half-Life*.

DOOM 3

HELL IS WAR

☐SYS PC/XB ☐PUB ACTIVISION ☐DEV ID ☐REL SUMMER, PC; FALL, XB

Doom 3 was playable for the first time at E3, albeit only for Xbox (Id is hard at work finishing up the PC version). Obvious enough, the game is incredibly moody: dimly lit corridors and pitch-black rooms abound, with only a flashlight to illuminate the path ahead and a shotgun to pave it. *Doom 3* runs rather smoothly on Xbox, and the combo of creepy visuals and creepy sound will make this the perfect complement for that other highly anticipated Xbox FPS.



CALL OF DUTY: UNITED OFFENSIVE

AND WAR IS HELL

☐SYS PC ☐PUB ACTIVISION ☐DEV GRAY MATTER ☐REL Q4

Leading the expansion-pack charge is *United Offensive*, *Call of Duty*'s first offspring. Contrary to a widely held belief, America didn't win WWII on its own...the efforts of other major allies Great Britain and Russia are also chronicled in *United Offensive*. Ten missions are split among the three Allied powers, the most exciting being a stint on a B-17, manning various gunning positions. Tragic as it was, WWII seems to be the war that keeps on giving.



ANDREW PFISTER
ASSOCIATE EDITOR

Coming into the show, I fully expected *Halo 2* and *Metroid Prime 2* to go head-to-head in a battle for "best FPS to come out in the month of November." After playing both, I'd give the slight edge to *Halo 2*. While *Metroid*'s single-player game looks incredible (to nobody's surprise), its lame implementation of multiplayer (four-player splitscreen is so 1998) was trounced by *Halo 2*'s awesome capture-the-flag demonstration. Both games will assuredly be great in their own right, but Nintendo's continued aversion to online (or heck, even LAN) makes *Halo 2* seem all that more special. But hey, everybody wins.

XB

PC

HALO 2

HEY THERE CHIEF

☐SYS XB ☐PUB MICROSOFT ☐DEV BUNGIE ☐REL NOVEMBER

After the first spring delay and amid reports that it wouldn't be playable at the show, having doubts about *Halo 2*'s progress seemed to be within reason. Showgoers who were fortunate enough to be admitted actually did have the opportunity to play a few rounds of *Halo 2*'s capture-the-flag mode, which turned out to be Bungie's way of saying, "We're doing quite well, thankyouverymuch." Though only one CTF map was available, it was very thoughtfully designed to incorporate and encourage the use of *Halo 2*'s new gameplay features, namely vehicle hijacking (Ghost pilots and Warthog gunners can be forcefully removed from their seats), high-jumping, the use of Covenant weapons such as the one-hit/one-kill Plasma Sword, and interactive environments.

After a few matches of Red versus Blue, it became apparent that *Halo 2* doesn't deviate from the source material in any significant way. This, of course, is a good thing. The additions, tweaks, and enhancements seen thus far blend perfectly with what everybody already loves about *Halo*






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BEAT-EM-UP

One of the most beloved genres of the arcade world, beat-em-ups have sweet spots in almost all gamers' hearts. Having them at home on consoles is gaming nirvana. Who doesn't enjoy teaming up with multiple characters to delve out daunting punishment? It's what fighting on computers is all about.

FORGOTTEN REALMS: DEMON STONE

DUNGEON AND DAMAGE

☐SYS PS2 ☐PUB ATARI ☐DEV STORMFRONT ☐REL SEPTEMBER

The *Dungeons & Dragons* franchise is alive and well, making great strides with this new third-person beat-em-up. Players follow the rogue, sorcerer, and fighter and can switch through these characters on the fly to take advantage of their various skills while taking down enemies.

As the player controls one character, the other two are A.I. controlled. This leaves room for some impressive combo strategy, like executing a melee attack with the fighter and then switching to the sorcerer for a lightning finisher. The game also includes subtle RPG elements, which include characters upgrading and refining their abilities as they progress.

But don't think that fancy control exploits are the extent of this game's artistry. Acclaimed novelist R.A. Salvatore, who wrote *Forgotten Realms* as a book, was brought aboard the project to write the story of the game. The end result should equal a well-rounded experience.



SPIKEOUT BATTLE STREET

TASTE MY CAN OF WHOOP A$$

☐SYS XB ☐PUB SEGA ☐DEV AMUSEMENT VISION ☐REL Q4

When Sega announced that this classic brawler was on its way to Xbox, the news got the attention of more than a few arcadeheads. The co-op beat-em-up, known best for its communal approach to slug-filled mayhem, was unfortunately unable to show off its multiplayer feats at this year's E3. But judging by the current progress, many of the arcade motifs are present. Spike, White, Tenshin, and Linda are all back with those grappling maneuvers that make virtual violence fun.



COWBOY BEBOP

HIPPEST BOUNTY HUNTERS IN ANIME

☐SYS PS2 ☐PUB BANDAI ☐DEV BANPRESTO ☐REL OCTOBER

This cel-shaded brawler tells a story happening somewhere in between the bookends of the TV series. Spike will dish out jeet kune do maneuvers, and his comrade Jet will keep it gangster with his no-nonsense street moves. Faye Valentine and other characters are playable in other modes. Yoko Kanno, the acclaimed composer for the TV series, is scoring the game.

HORROR

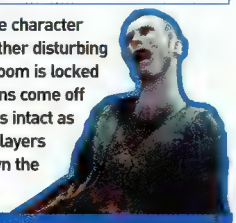
Nobody would have guessed back in the early '80s that games would one day have the ability to scare the hell out of us. As designers continue to innovate, the tools at their disposal grow more sophisticated. Game developers can now play with our emotions the way film directors have for decades.

SILENT HILL 4: THE ROOM

THE MESSIEST ROOM EVER

☐SYS PS2/XB ☐PUB KONAMI ☐DEV KONAMI ☐REL SEPTEMBER

The new *Silent Hill* revolves around a new male character trapped in a dilapidated room. (You'll access other disturbing areas in the game through portals.) The door in the room is locked and chained, and as the game progresses, these chains come off one by one. Most of the traditional *SH* combat remains intact as characters beat monsters with sticks—except now, players can control how hard they deliver hits by holding down the X button. Back up, fool!



FATAL FRAME II

SCARIEST TWINS BESIDES THE OLSENS

☐SYS XB ☐PUB TECMO ☐DEV TECMO ☐REL OCTOBER

The Xbox version of *Fatal Frame II*, to be released sometime around Halloween, has all kinds of new features. The first-person mode raises the freak factor a tad, and the new survival mode puts you in a room where you're overwhelmed by a barrage of murderous ghosts. A new village called All God's Village has wider roaming space. And all this will play in 5.1 surround sound to ensure your seat is left wet.

RESIDENT EVIL 4

GET EVIL IN STYLE!

☐SYS GC ☐PUB CAPCOM ☐DEV CAPCOM ☐REL NOVEMBER

The enemies and location aren't the only things that have changed—the main character has some of the coolest clothes in gaming. Leon is a secret government operative who goes to a small European town in search of the president's daughter. Unfortunately, the local townsfolk aren't as warm as he expected, and he must peel off a couple of caps before it's all over.

Resident Evil 4 introduces vehicles and implements several new gameplay devices, including the option to view things over the shoulder in third person or zoom in with first person. Then there are the *Shenmue*-like Special Actions buttons for climbing a ladder or jumping through a window to evade danger. Once you find the president's daughter, she's weak and in your care for the entire second half of the game (kind of like Yorda, from *Ico*, but with guns and messy hair). Tastes good to us.





ACTION

URBAN LIFE SIMULATOR

This genre owes most of its fame to a little game called *Grand Theft Auto*. These games take city settings and allow players to embrace the role of the antihero, tearing through villains who warrant gratuitous violence. Sometimes innocent people get caught in the crossfire. Hopefully, they'll learn to duck.

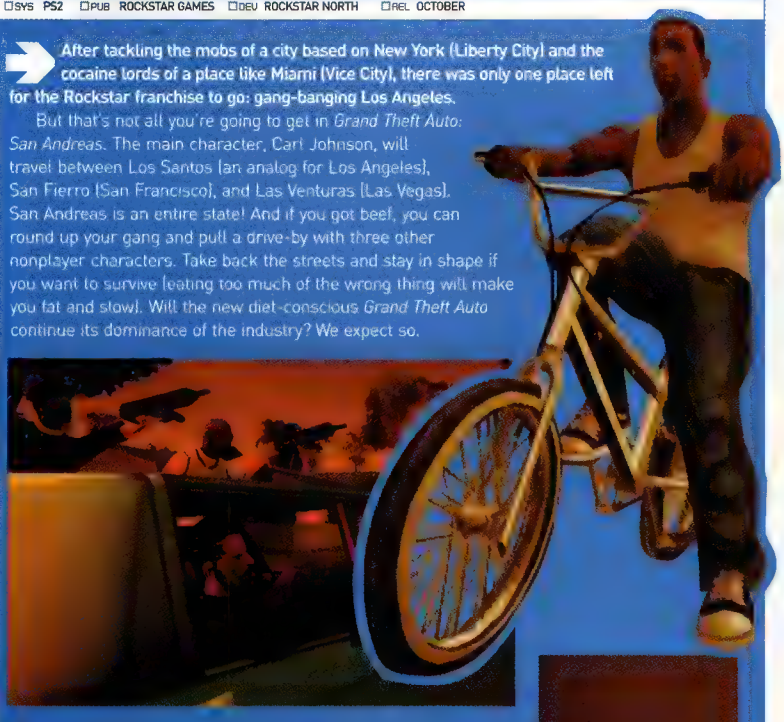
GRAND THEFT AUTO: SAN ANDREAS

TO LIVE AND DIE IN SAN ANDREAS

☐SYS PS2 ☐PUB ROCKSTAR GAMES ☐DEV ROCKSTAR NORTH ☐REL OCTOBER

After tackling the mobs of a city based on New York (Liberty City) and the cocaine lords of a place like Miami (Vice City), there was only one place left for the Rockstar franchise to go: gang-banging Los Angeles.

But that's not all you're going to get in *Grand Theft Auto: San Andreas*. The main character, Carl Johnson, will travel between Los Santos (an analog for Los Angeles), San Fierro (San Francisco), and Las Venturas (Las Vegas). San Andreas is an entire state! And if you got beef, you can round up your gang and pull a drive-by with three other nonplayer characters. Take back the streets and stay in shape if you want to survive (eating too much of the wrong thing will make you fat and slow). Will the new diet-conscious *Grand Theft Auto* continue its dominance of the industry? We expect so.





DESTROY ALL HUMANS

IT'S BEEN LONG OVERDUE!

☐SYS PS2/XB ☐PUB THQ ☐DEV PANDEMIC ☐REL SPRING 2005

One of the benefits of videogames is the freedom that developers have to give the public fictional experiences that the mainstream or even the independent film industry just can't. Pandemic Studios' new game *Destroy All Humans* says all this with a little blue alien named Crypto-137. By taking a *Grand Theft Auto*–esque approach to game design, this game gives players the opportunity to destroy innocents with advanced alien technology. You're no longer fighting for survival, but the joy of domination.



THE GETAWAY: BLACK MONDAY

LONDON THUGS

☐SYS PS2 ☐PUB SONY ☐DEV SCEE ☐REL DECEMBER

We learned at this year's E3 that *The Getaway 2* is now called *The Getaway: Black Monday*. It's still unclear if this new title means the plot relates to the crashing stock market of 1929. We're just sure we can expect a painstakingly detailed model of London, Cockney badasses, and a cinematic gaming experience that is hopefully less annoying than the first rendition. There are also plans for multiple playable characters this time around. Get pumped!



XB

PS2

RACING

The gulf splitting the racing genre gets bigger and bigger at every E3. Sims like *Gran Turismo* are even more sim than before, while arcade games reach greater and greater heights of speed and outlandish handling. There's not much happening in the center, but nobody playing *Burnout* or *Forza* at the show seemed to mind.

BURNOUT 3

WRECK ANYTHING AND EVERYTHING

☐SYS PS2/XB ☐PUB ELECTRONIC ARTS ☐DEV CRITERION ☐REL OCTOBER

Burnout is like the anti-*OutRun*, a white-knuckle exercise in nonstop destruction. Criterion's goal is to make this an even more adversarial game than before by offering massive boost bonuses for crashing opponents out of a race. The result is impressively messy—this is an amazing graphical showcase, combining a blazing sense of speed with outstanding particle effects and superdetailed damage models for 70-plus cars. EA's newfound Xbox Live support means the game provides the best online experience in race and crash modes.



ENTHUSIA

PROFESSIONAL RACING. VRROOM!

☐SYS PS2 ☐PUB KONAMI ☐DEV KONAMI TYO ☐REL 2005

E3 saw a couple of contenders for *Gran Turismo*'s crown, but Konami's *Enthusia* probably has the best shot. Producer Manabu Akita proudly showed off physics demos exactly replicating a Mazda Miata's real performance within the game's simulation. The finished game will do the same for hundreds of licensed cars, and there's more breadth to the track selection than in some other sim racers. Lonely desert rallies offer a quiet alternative to the usual street courses and racetracks.

XB

PS2

OUTRUN 2

ON A CLEAR DAY YOU CAN SEE FOREVER...

☐SYS XB ☐PUB BANDAI ☐DEV SUMO DIGITAL ☐REL TBA

Normally, bad things happen when AM2 has somebody else port its games to consoles. Too bad Sumo Digital wasn't around to do *Virtua Fighter 3* because *OutRun 2* on Xbox looks good enough to satisfy all but the most nitpicky arcade fiends. Sumo has already perfectly replicated all 15 arcade stages and four Ferraris (out of a final eight) to chuck around the courses' beautiful curves.

Spotty arcade distribution means that most players won't appreciate the game until this fall. But it looks like it'll arrive intact with a smooth framerate, no multiplayer lag, no pop-up even in the most expansive stages, and no changes to the arcade handling.

OutRun 2 drives unlike any other Sega racer. Its drifting mechanics are looser than *Super GT*'s, tighter than *Sega Rally*'s, and less painfully immediate than *Daytona*'s, but with their own sure, predictable feel. Xbox Live races and new console-exclusive stages should make this the best road trip money can buy—unless you've got the cash for a Lamborghini.







FLIGHT

Pity the poor flight genre. It never seemed to click with the console gamer the way it did with the PC crowd (and its popularity has waned on that platform in recent years, too). Nevertheless, Namco is keeping the faith alive and looking out for all you wannabe pilots.

ACE COMBAT 5

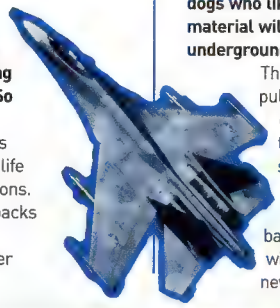
I WANNA FLY. SKY HIGH

☐SYS PS2 ☐PUB NAMCO ☐DEV NAMCO ☐REL SEPTEMBER

The *Ace Combat* series has been around since the dawn of the PlayStation, and it's been getting better with each new installment. Each game brings gamers closer to truly living out their *Top Gun* fantasies without the inevitable pain that comes from clacking your teeth together really hard. Not only is this the best-looking entry in the series, but there's also plenty of the same high-flying action that has kept the *Ace Combat* games around for so long. So what does *Ace Combat 5* bring to the table?

Expect four different play modes, with just one of the modes containing 30 different scenarios. There are more than 50 real-life aircraft to use in both dogfights and air-to-ground-based missions. Players aren't alone in the game, either. A squad of wingmen backs them up when commanded.

And hey, isn't it nice to see a military game that isn't another squad-based shooter?



SPORTS

Nothing lends itself better to videogames than sports. The architecture of competition translates seamlessly, allowing gamers to perform amazing athletic feats without breaking a sweat (or a bone).



TONY HAWK'S UNDERGROUND 2

TOTALLY!

☐SYS GBA/GC/PSP/PS2/XB ☐PUB ACTIVISION ☐DEV NEVERSOFT ☐REL OCTOBER; 2005 PSP

The best of *Tony Hawk's Underground* is back, with a more lighthearted tone. For starters, there's a classic mode for all the old dogs who like the old *Tony Hawk* games just fine. But those who want fresh material will get a story about the life of a pro skater recruiting underground talent for a new skate team.

The potentials range from a milk delivery man to a 3-foot alien. To pull off those new tricks, there's a new focus mode, which slows everything down while you key in the appropriate buttons. Then there is the vandalism aspect of the game, which has you slapping stickers everywhere, tagging on walls, and chucking stuff at innocent people.

And if you're still not satisfied, the developers have brought back those interactive stages. In one, pulling off the proper move will set off a cannon that demolishes a construction site, forming a new skate park. Rad!

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HANDHELD

E3 shows are rarely an exciting time for handhelds, but this year was a big exception. Not only was there a load of great new GBA titles, but the introduction of Sony's PSP and Nintendo's DS proved that the portable-gaming market is about to get a lot more exciting.

KINGDOM HEARTS: CHAIN OF MEMORIES

KINGDOM HEART OF THE CARDS

☐SYS GBA ☐PUB SQUARE ENIX ☐DEV SQUARE ENIX ☐REL SEPTEMBER

It's tough waiting for *Kingdom Hearts II* for PS2, but this game should tide you over quite nicely. It does, after all, continue the story line from the original but with some unique new gameplay elements.

The game is played from an isometric perspective, with Sora and his Disney pals running through ample platforming segments (get ready for precision jumping). The combat, however, features a strange new card-based system. Each attack uses up a card in Sora's deck, and when you run out of cards, you must frantically hit the Attack button to reshuffle your cards to regain the ability to fight.

ASTRO BOY: OMEGA FACTOR

EVERYTHING IS GO

☐SYS GBA ☐PUB SEGA ☐DEV TREASURE/HITMAKER ☐REL AUGUST

GBA

It's hard to go wrong with a game programmed by Treasure (maker of *Ikaruga* and the Genesis classic *Gunstar Heroes*). It's even harder to go wrong with a Treasure game starring a classic anime character who has machine guns that pop out of his butt.



This is the type of top-notch, old-school platform game that GBA was made for. Solid gameplay, tight control, and tons of bad guys to fight—*Astro Boy* has it all.

LEGEND OF ZELDA: THE MINISH CAP

THE MINISH DIMINISH GET IT?

☐SYS GBA ☐PUB NINTENDO ☐DEV CAPCOM ☐REL 2005

Sure, this title may have been overlooked a bit due to that other new *Zelda* game, but there's no denying that this is one of the most exciting handheld games coming out in the next year.

This 2D adventure is being developed by Capcom, but don't be too surprised. Capcom also developed the excellent *Oracle of Ages* and *Oracle of Seasons* games in the *Zelda* saga for Game Boy Color.

The *Minish Cap* refers to the magical hat Link wears in the game. It allows him to shrink down to the size of the wee Minish people, who Link (go figure) needs to help out. There will also be other new items, including a device that sucks in objects and then punches them back out. Items, some of which will be integral in solving the game's multiple new puzzles.

You can even use the GBA (version) adapter to link up with a friend for multiplayer action.





MISSING IN ACTION

THE BIGGEST GAMES THAT SKIPPED E3

At every E3, there's the occasional no-show, a game that *everyone* thought would be there and instead stayed under the radar. This year's biggest blank space was the sequel to *Ico*, a rumored Sony flagship as far back as last year. SCE has trademarked the game's rumored title, *Nico*, in Japan, though, so unless the company is making a game about the rock group the Velvet Underground, we'll learn more sometime in the coming year.

Two of Microsoft's Japanese Xbox Live projects stayed under wraps (some more permanently than others). Level 5's MMORPG *True Fantasy Live Online* skipped the show, because it was cancelled (see our story in the FRONT section). Meanwhile, the online action game *Phantom Dust*, last seen at the Tokyo Game Show in September 2003, was nowhere to be found in Microsoft's massive E3 display.

Psychonauts and *Steef's Oddysee*, the two projects that kicked off Microsoft's release slate earlier this spring, also missed the show. Double Fine Studios and Oddworld Inhabitants are both reportedly still looking for new publishers to back them.

At the Eidos booth, Lara Croft skipped E3 for the first time in recent memory. Insiders say the latest *Tomb Raider* is looking good at Crystal Dynamics, but Eidos PR reps wouldn't say word one about the game, which, according to recent financial reports, is targeted for release by the end of next summer.

Nintendo bucked persistent rumors by showing no evidence of a new GameCube *Mario* adventure (*Mario 128* it seems is the stuff of urban legend). The new game from the directors of *Super Mario Sunshine* is the rhythm-action platformer *Donkey Kong: Jungle Beat*. Finally, Square Enix USA may one day give *Dragon Warrior* fans their due, but it won't happen this year. *Kingdom Hearts 2* and *Final Fantasy XII* made splashy debuts, but *Dragon Warrior VIII* and the PS2 remake of *Dragon Warrior V* were notably MIA.

PUZZLE

Tetris is great and all, but there are only so many "blocks falling into a pit" puzzle games that one can play before they all tend to blur together. That's why it was such a treat so see some shiny new puzzlers at this year's E3. A great way to while away a few minutes, or an even better way to start some multiplayer smacktalk.

KATAMARI DAMACY

TRASHY. WE MEAN THAT IN A GOOD WAY

☐SYS PS2 ☐PUB NAMCO ☐DEV NAMCO ☐REL DECEMBER

One of the most original games at E3 was Namco's _Katamari Damacy_ (say it slowly; you'll get it). In this bizarre title, players control the Prince of Space, whose father, the King of Space (natch) has destroyed all the stars in the night sky during a night of drunken revelry.

The task is to replace the stars by rolling a ball around on the Earth's surface. As the ball rolls over objects, they get stuck to the sphere, creating a larger and larger ball of garbage. If players build a big enough "star" within the time limit, it gets shot into space, and they move on to the next stage. Initially, the ball can only pick up small objects and trash, but in later levels, it will be able to snag people, houses, and eventually skyscrapers. It's both weird and fun.

PUYO POP FEVER

SEGA'S MEAN BEAN AVALANCHE

☐SYS PSP ☐PUB SEGA ☐DEV SEGA ☐REL JUNE 2005

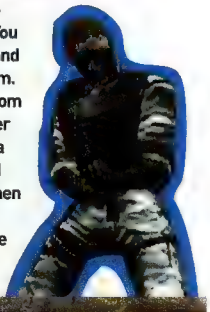


OK, so _Puyo Pop_ falls into that "falling block" category of puzzle games, but come on! It's _Puyo Pop_, its greatness can't be ignored. Besides, everyone needs a quality puzzle game to go along with the slick new Sony handheld system.

Probably the game's most exciting feature is its support for the PSP's wireless LAN. Now it'll be no problem to link up with other players to match a few colors and pop a few puyos.

ARCADE

Arcades aren't dying. They're dead. Sorry, Dave n' Busters doesn't count. But don't despair. Some companies still know exactly what the games are all about. You have twitchy fingers, and you're itchin' to use 'em. These are our picks from the best of E3's meager selection. If you want a dose of fast action and excellent gameplay, then look no further than these games. Cigarette burns are optional.





TIME CRISIS: CRISIS ZONE

BULLETS OF PURE LOVE

☐SYS PS2 ☐PUB NAMCO ☐DEV NAMCO ☐REL SEPTEMBER

Someone at Namco must have said, "Wouldn't _Time Crisis_ be more fun with machine guns?" Well, someone at Namco was right. The classic light-gun shooting series has been refitted with fully automatic weaponry but keeps the silly presentation and pulse-pounding duck-and-cover play mechanics. Namco's also beefing up the levels to incorporate twin-Guncon machine-gun-style blastin' action. Solid.

ODAMA

PINBALL WARLORD

☐SYS GC ☐PUB NINTENDO ☐DEV VIVARIUM ☐REL 2005

Nintendo's terse description of this game is "military pinball"—as though that clears anything up. _Odama_ ("big ball") is being developed by the same group that did _Seaman_. _Odama_ is almost as bizarre but a lot more playable.

What that means is it marries elements of real-time strategy with a classic game of pinball to create one weird game. The playfield is a battleground, with scores of troops running back and forth. Players don't control them directly, though, instead moving the ball around the battlefield with the help of flippers, as in a typical pinball game. But actions can help free prisoners, convert enemies to allies, and destroy the opposing feudal lord. Wacky, but it works.

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ROLE-PLAYING: TRADITIONAL

The traditional role-playing genre is here to stay. In fact, it's continually pushing the boundaries of both gaming and floor space. It flooded the show floor on both PC and consoles, with more standout titles than we could count on both hands. Still, we have to boil it down somehow. We've played the games, scratched our heads a lot, and discussed the relative merits of the lead characters' fruity outfits, resulting in this scientifically perfect selection of the deepest, most promising sagas at the show.

FINAL FANTASY XII

METROSEXUALITY: THE ADVENTURE

☐SYS PS2 ☐PUB SQUARE ENIX ☐DEV SQUARE ENIX ☐REL SPRING 2005





At this point, it's obvious what to expect when Square Enix announces a new *Final Fantasy* game: surprises. Yasumi Matsuno, the man behind *Final Fantasy Tactics*, has been put in charge this time around, and things couldn't be more different. Actually, scratch that; the new *FF* pays a debt to *Final Fantasy XI*...a big one. With no battle-scene transitions and automatic turn-based attacks, it feels like an offline mutation of that game more than a new single-player *FF* should...but it works.

For *FFXII*, players are whisked away to the Royal City of Rabanastre, where the sartorially challenged and hilariously effeminate Vaan is on the make, and his girlfriend Penelo is on his (frilly) jock about his lifestyle. He wants to be an air pirate, but under the oppressive rule of The Empire (don't you hate those guys?), things aren't easy.

Stunning graphics and obscene character detail help elevate the story, and with gameplay flying off into left field, it's clear that this is one *FF* that will make as many new series fans as it loses.

PS2

SHADOW HEARTS: COVENANT

TRANS EUROPE EXPRESS

☐SYS PS2 ☐PUB MIDWAY ☐DEV NAUTILUS ☐REL FALL

The sequel to the best PS2 RPG you never played, *Covenant* returns to the characters and world of 2001's *Shadow Hearts*. The game's main character, Yuri, can transform into a demon (these days, who can't?). He is cursed by a sinister priest while defending a French village in WWI and must journey across war-torn Europe to find a cure. The game's trademark Judgment Ring battle system has been expanded and should prove a treat once again.





CHRISTIAN NUTT
ASSOCIATE EDITOR

While *Final Fantasy XII* is winning plaudits from just about everyone, I remain unconvinced due to its bizarre battle system. It's gorgeous, though, setting a new high-water mark for cinematics.

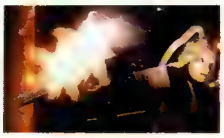
I command PS2 owners to check out *Suikoden IV* and *Xenosaga Episode II*. While we didn't have room to feature them, they're fine sequels that outclass their PS2 predecessors.

DIGITAL DEVIL SAGA: AVATAR TUNER

UGLY ON THE INSIDE

☐SYS PS2 ☐PUB ATLUS ☐DEV ATLUS ☐REL NOVEMBER

This stylish RPG—covered in depth in our last issue—comes like a bat out of hell to shake up the genre with stunning visuals, a mature story, and compelling gameplay. Instead of saving the world, you're trying to save yourself—as you and your friends have been transfigured into demons. It's about as cheery as it sounds; you power up by snacking on your dead opponents while fending off attacks from similarly diabolically deformed militant tribes.



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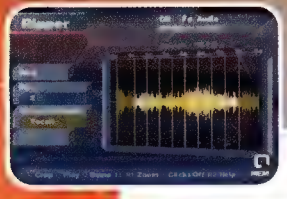
music generator 3

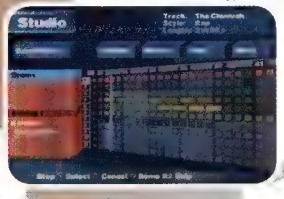
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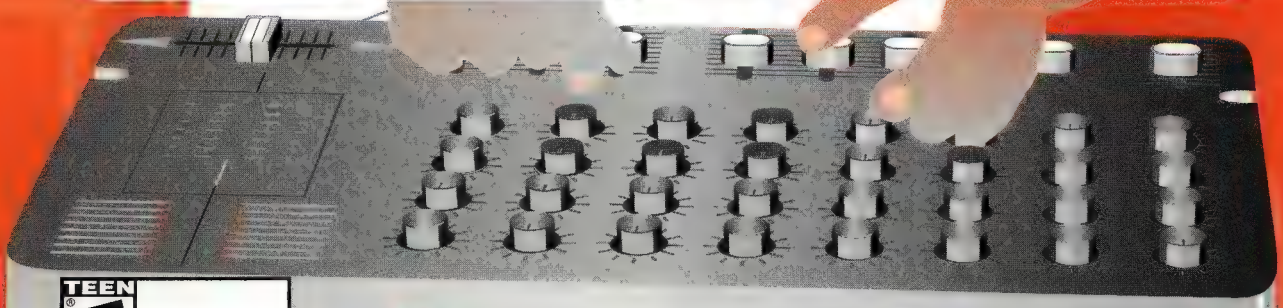
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PlayStation.2 XBOX

Codemasters GENIUS AT PLAY

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MMORPG

If anything was made clear by E3 2004, it's that publishers hope to snag you—and your credit card digits—with addictive massively multiplayer online RPGs. (Try saying "muh-more-pig" instead, like we do.) In fact, the genre is so big we had to bust it out on its own. See our feature story on page 72 for a scorchingly in-depth look at the very best upcoming games in the genre.









XB

GC

ACTION

Action-RPGs are so cool we've been forced to spin them off into their own genre. Just when they seemed to be on the wane, too. No longer; with innovation coming from both East and West, this is the place to come if you like a cool story with a nice side of sword swingin' or punchin' and kickin'. These games brutalized their opponents to claw to the top of the E3 heap.

THE LEGEND OF ZELDA

PROMISES KEPT

☐SYS GC ☐PUB NINTENDO ☐DEV NINTENDO ☐REL 2005

When Nintendo debuted this game as a surprise at the end of its E3 press conference, some of the more hardcore fans in the audience actually burst into tears. The controversy that *The Wind Waker* drew in the wake of its move to toon-shaded graphics is in the past now. It was fantastic, and this new game will serve as the mature *Zelda* that fans always wanted. Little Link's all grown up.

Of course, growing up isn't just about changing the graphics. Just as *Ocarina of Time*'s adult Link outpaced his bratty incarnation, so too will elder Link's powers outclass those of the *Wind Waker* Link. Expect a more athletic and capable character, as well as a focus on deeper combat this time around. Link's back in the saddle, too; video shown at E3 depicted him battling pursuers from horseback.

While Miyamoto has vetoed spoken dialogue, as usual, we can expect something a bit darker from the story, too. Fans wanted maturity out of *Zelda*, but so did Nintendo. Now everyone can be happy.





JADE EMPIRE

KOTOR SHMOTOR

☐SYS XB ☐PUB MICROSOFT ☐DEV BIOWARE ☐REL WINTER 2005

The people behind *Knights of the Old Republic* finally let gamers get their hands on this action-packed RPG at E3, and most comers walked away enthralled. Featuring hand-to-hand fighting that encompasses a variety of martial-art styles and a story cribbed equally from classic Asian literature and kung fu movies, this game pushes BioWare further toward the top of the console heap. Canada might not be the Far East, but it sure feels like it right now.

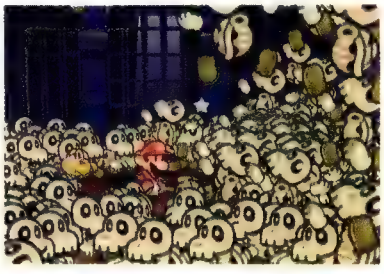


PAPER MARIO 2

FLAT OUT

☐SYS GC ☐PUB NINTENDO ☐DEV INTELLIGENT SYSTEMS ☐REL OCTOBER

The world's most famous plumber is back, flat, and ready to rock in this trend-bucking RPG. Well, gameplaywise, that is. Like any self-respecting *Mario* game, it launches with the kidnapping of Princess Peach. Some things just aren't meant to change, apparently. Of course, this game's left-of-center humor has fun lampooning this story, and the action-based battle system will keep you tapping your fingers as you chuckle your way through the Mushroom Kingdom.



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STRATEGY

Not quite the king of all gaming it was just a few years ago (that crown now belongs to the FPS), the strategy genre is—the gods be praised—still thriving, with some particular standouts coming this year. Taking a cue from Hollywood, strategies are going all epic on us, with big, beautiful battles as the order of the day. Still, we dream of the day when a *StarCraft 2* emerges to reclaim its throne.



TOM BYRON EDITOR-IN-CHIEF

It seems the strategy developers have answered one too many male-enhancement e-mails as the "bigger is better" trend rages on: bigger armies, bigger environments, bigger everything.

But you won't hear me complain. The RTS world has been waiting for a viable replacement for *Rise of Nations*, and *Rome: TW* is it. The funny part? When I first glimpsed *RTW* last E3, I thought too bad these guys don't have the *LOTR* license. Then EA came along and answered my dreams. *For Gondor!*

PIKMIN 2

MIYAMOTO'S GARDEN

☐SYS GC ☐PUB NINTENDO ☐DEV NINTENDO
☐REL OCTOBER

Who else but the great Shigeru Miyamoto could create a game based on a personal hobby? His quirky *Pikmin*, a GameCube launch title, left many scratching their heads but many, many more buying the game. This year, Miyamoto's paean to gardening gets a sequel. Lead character Captain Olimar is back with two new Pikmin types: Purple and White. The former is sumo-wrestler strong; the latter is impervious to poison. With a two-player mode and other enhancements, *Pikmin 2* could be everything the first game should have been.



THE LORD OF THE RINGS: BATTLE FOR MIDDLE-EARTH

LORD OF THE RTS

☐SYS PC ☐PUB EA GAMES
☐DEV EA LA ☐REL FALL

LOTR: Battle for Middle-earth is possibly the best-looking RTS to surface in years. True, little is yet known about actual gameplay, but in terms of *LOTR* authenticity, *BFME* is an achievement. Built upon the *C&C: Generals* engine, the game serves up J.R.R. Tolkien's world in the epic battleground it's been waiting for. One concern: EA's license is for the Peter Jackson films only, so no word if dwarf armies will make an appearance.



PC

GC

ROME: TOTAL WAR

PIGS ON FIRE

☐SYS PC ☐PUB ACTIVISION ☐DEV CREATIVE ASSEMBLY ☐REL SEPTEMBER





Screw *Pax Romana*—war is more fun. Creative Assembly's masterwork, *Rome: Total War*, is to gaming what epics like *Lawrence of Arabia* are to film. Equal parts real-time and turn-based strategy, *RTW* lets players command the great armies of the Roman Empire, from the Punic Wars through the death of the emperor Augustus.

Great armies, indeed. Try up to 10,000 troops onscreen at one time and all controllable on both macro and micro levels. The E3 demo showed vast armies laying siege to Carthage. Entire legions were manipulated in a traditional RTS style. Zooming in, Carthaginian elephant units came crashing through a Roman column. Live pigs were set on fire, scattering enemy troops into chaos. This bizarre tactic, among many others, is historically based and speaks to the game's painstaking authenticity.

RTW has its more feminine turn-based side in which players manage the empire they're building, though the robust A.I. can handle this aspect as well. The 3D engine featuring rolling terrain is simply icing on the Roman cake.



GMR PRESENTS

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FIGHTING

Life bars are back in a big way. There has been a notable lull since the near simultaneous release of *Soul Calibur 2* and *Virtua Fighter 4: Evolution* last year, and while those two games are cutting-edge 3D fighters, this year we'll see a resurgence of both 3D and old-school 2D fighters. Here's what's coming up....

DEAD OR ALIVE: ULTIMATE

BEAT YOU TO THE PUNCH

☐SYS XB ☐PUB TECMO ☐DEV TEAM NINJA ☐REL OCTOBER

Whether you mention *Dead or Alive* in the same sentence as *Virtua Fighter*, *Soul Calibur*, or *Tekken* is a matter of personal preference, but the series that put Team Ninja on the map has always offered the genre's best graphics and innovated in ways that no other game has. The original *DOA* introduced danger zones, which offer explosive results for any unfortunate fighter who happens to fall on them, and *DOA2* added multitiered fighting arenas and an expanded reversal system that keeps the fighting fast, and most certainly, furious. Now the best of both worlds is set to land not only on Xbox, but Xbox Live as well in the very near future.

Featuring nearly twice as many backgrounds as the original *DOA2: Hardcore* (including one arena borrowed from *DOA: Xtreme Beach Volleyball*), *DOA: Ultimate* also adds a wardrobe full of extra costumes and highly interactive arenas that find our fighters slamming each other against Chinese gongs and irritable elephants, up into ceilings, and even down snowy slopes (with the victim used as a human snowboard!). Team Ninja promises that *Ultimate* will be the fastest, most responsive game yet played on Xbox Live.





JAMES MIELKE. EXECUTIVE EDITOR

The fighting-game genre was in serious danger of fading from sight. After all, these are basically arcade games with some added bells and whistles, and they appeal mostly to hardcore gamers. So I'm glad to see a major resurgence of these beautiful brawlers. Another title to look out for is *Capcom Fighting Jam*. That fighter looks like sheer 2D sickness, and that's a good thing.

TEKKEN 5

KICK IN THE EYE

☐SYS PS2 ☐PUB/DEV NAMCO ☐REL ARCADES 2004; PS2 FEB. 2005

Tekken 5 looks like it might be the shot in the arm the series so desperately needs. A beautiful new graphics engine puts *T5* on a level equal to, if not beyond, that of *Soul Calibur 2*. Throw in a heaping helping of interactive backgrounds (a burning building, a coin-covered treasure cove, etc.), some *Street Fighter*–inspired moves, and three brutal new characters (Asuka Kazama, Raven, and Feng Wei), and you've got a fighting game that'll have us checking our watch till its early 2005 release on consoles.



GUILTY GEAR ISUKA

THE RAZOR'S EDGE

☐SYS PS2 ☐PUB SAMMY ☐DEV ARC SYSTEM WORKS ☐REL FALL

The 2D fighter that would be king continues to roll on in this, its umpteenth installment. Determined to show *Street Fighter* what time it is with its eclectic cast of detailed, fluidly animated fighters, *Isuka* brings fast-paced four-player tag-team battles (à la *Marvel vs. Capcom*) to the fold while adding brand-new arenas and three new characters (for a grand total of 23). A unique side-scrolling adventure (think *JoJo's Bizarre Adventure*) lies in wait for those more interested in the single-player experience.



XB

PS2


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SIM

Games like *The Sims* have proven that simulation games have wide appeal and that people have an insatiable desire to control their lives, albeit maybe not their real ones. Now that games have gone beyond keeping our onscreen doppelgangers' needs fulfilled, the genre is moving into new territory, incorporating stories, making virtual movies, and even getting "busy" with virtual partners.

ALTERLIFE

MY SO-CALLED GIRLY LIFE

☐SYS PC ☐PUB NCSOFT ☐DEV NCSOFT ☐REL LATE 2005

Oozing Japan-chic, *AlterLife* immediately stands apart from other sim games. It needs to—this game is targeted to female gamers and focuses on nonviolent socialization. Like *The Sims Online*, it's a massive online game. Unlike that game, though, players follow a story interspersed with minigames and quests. Players can own and decorate a house—presumably, one with überstyle.

THE URBZ: SIMS IN THE CITY

THE SIMS GET MAJOR 'TUDE

☐SYS GC/PS2/XB ☐PUB EA GAMES ☐DEV MAXIS ☐REL NOVEMBER

Maxis is striving to cram as much hipness as possible into this latest iteration of the console *Sims*. Central to the citified game is one's rep; as Sims'—er, Urbz' reps grow, they gain access to cooler places and people. The urban setting includes such trappings as subways, tattoos, and sushi, and incorporates a PDA-style interface. A fun new twist on the *Sims*, or a cringe-worthy attempt at urban cool? Hmm...



CARRIE SHEPHERD, MANAGING EDITOR

How predictable was it that the sim genre would eventually produce games that would let sad, lonely gamers focus on getting "lucky," à la Eidos' *Singles: Flirt Up Your Life*? Personally, I'm most interested in the MMORPG sim *AlterLife* because the music and graphics are so phenomenally cool. I've already watched the promo movie a million times.

THE MOVIES

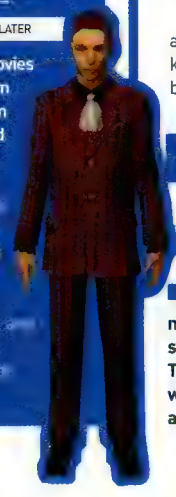
CAN YOU MAKE THE NEXT TITANIC?

☐SYS GC/PC/PS2/XB ☐PUB ACTIVISION ☐DEV LIONHEAD ☐REL PC, OCTOBER, CONSOLES, LATER

Everyone seems to think they can do a better job making movies than Hollywood. Peter Molyneux's latest simulation lets them put their money where their mouths are—handling everything from selecting the costumes and props down to adding sound effects and subtitles—but players can decide how nitty-gritty they want to get.

Spanning the entire evolution of the art, players run their own studios from the days of silent film to the present, and beyond. And of course there are all the financial and personality considerations. If one actor gets a plush trailer, the other cast members may want one, too; some talent may need to rehab.

What may really give this game legs, though, are the player additions. Gamers will be able to make their own costumes, props, and sets and share them online; movies can be saved and e-mailed to friends. The game has its own critique system, but one's real friends may prove harsher.



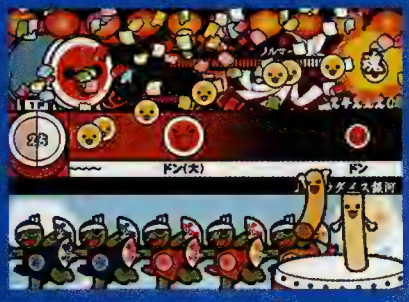
TAIKO DRUM MASTER

DRUM ROLL PLEASE

☐SYS PS2 ☐PUB NAMCO ☐DEV NAMCO ☐REL HOLIDAY 2004

Taiko No Tatsujin, as it's known in its native Japan, was such a big hit in that country, Namco decided to try it with American gamers as well. It has undergone a name change and some tweaks to its music selections to suit American tastes, but *Taiko Drum Master* should be no less fun—and thankfully, it will retain its surreal graphics. Players follow onscreen instructions and tap the rhythm of songs either on one or both sides of the miniature taiko drum controller. (You can use a DualShock 2 controller, too, but that takes away the whole point.)

The game has more than 30 songs and a choice of difficulty levels, and up to four people can duel it out, taiko style, to see who has superior rhythm. Minigames with non-music objectives flesh out the gameplay.



MUSIC

Ever since *PaRappa the Rapper* debuted for PS1 back in 1997, music-based games have had a reputation for quirkiness. Now that button-tapping rhythms has become more mainstream, the genre has moved to incorporating mics and other peripherals. *Samba de Amigo*'s maracas may be sadly defunct, but drumming is the new hot thing.



DONKEY KONGA

WE GOT THE BEAT

☐SYS GC ☐PUB NINTENDO ☐DEV NAMCO LTD. ☐REL SEPTEMBER

Nintendo is new to the music genre and has just released its own DK Bongo peripheral—which has a left and right drum, of course, as well as a mic that picks up clapping.

Players drum along to rhythms shown onscreen and progress according to their accuracy—and they can jam with up to three others. With 30 songs, ranging from kids' ditties to pop standards, and three difficulty levels, *Donkey Konga* is bound to be a rarely achieved "fun for whole family" title.

DONKEY KONG: JUNGLE BEAT

AND THE BEAT GOES ON

☐SYS GC ☐PUB NINTENDO ☐DEV NINTENDO ☐REL 2005

Nintendo wisely has a second game in the works that uses the DK Bongo controller—but not strictly for keeping the beat. Players use the Bongo to make Donkey Kong run, jump, swing on vines, and spar with other apes in a side-scrolling adventure rounded out by banana collecting and vehicle/animal riding. They can even use their drumming prowess to create mighty sound waves that will stun enemies. Knowing Nintendo, expect the quirk to go beyond the controls and extend into some really innovative gameplay.

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SCAVENGER HUNT!

During this year's E3, while developers, media, and gamers celebrated the greatness of the videogames they love, spies lurked amongst them. Spies secretly cataloging instances of insanity for the purposes of competition, The Great E3 Photo Scavenger Hunt. Andrew Pfister and I each built teams of scavenger-hunting specialists to track down and document 13 targets in a deadly battle of wits and photography. _Seanbaby

2 FAST 2 COURTEOUS

Made up mostly of my drinking buddies, 2 Fast 2 Courteous had a solid mix of me and sex appeal. As for our name, it was stolen directly from the name of a team of loan officers my roommate's girlfriend overheard on a corporate retreat, and has nothing to do with our cruel approach to photo hunting. Were we to actually have a descriptive name, it would be closer to "Team Holy Crap, Get a Picture of That Fat Guy! Yeah, I'm Talking about You, Fatty!"

SEANBABY - TEAM CAPTAIN

PRIMARY ABILITY: FACE ROCKING
SECONDARY ABILITY: DRUNK BEYOND CAPACITY FOR PAIN OR FATIGUE



I'm a comedic journalist and columnist. Hi. I collect self-defense books about people kicking each other in the dong, videogames about Jesus, pregnancy workout videos, and objects on which Mr. T's visage has miraculously appeared.

GABBY KOLOSZAR

PRIMARY ABILITY: STEALTH
SECONDARY ABILITY: CUTE



We often needed to get pictures of someone without their knowledge, because when someone looks like the result of Chewbacca having sex with Rick Moranis, they're going to know you're not taking their picture because you think they're a booth babe. These stealth missions were Gabby's duty.

CAROLINE KING

PRIMARY ABILITY: BEGUILEMENT
SECONDARY ABILITY: MISDIRECTION



If we needed a picture of you punching your own mother in the stomach and couldn't find this occurring naturally, Caroline could sweet-talk you into doing it as many times as necessary to get the perfect lighting on the poor woman's confused and screaming face.

BRYAN STRATTON

PRIMARY ABILITY: TACTICAL SHOVING
SECONDARY ABILITY: DEATH METAL APPRECIATION



Years of writing strategy guides have given Bryan an efficient, almost barbaric approach to winning. If it means mounting a full-frontal assault through a crowd of nerds to douse a mascot in napalm just to get a picture of a fireman, he'll do it. Without remorse.

EDDIE DOTY

PRIMARY ABILITY: SCOUTING
SECONDARY ABILITY: UNARMED COMBAT



Eddie is a documentarian and an editor for some of your least-favorite TV shows, which may be where he acquired his ultravision. If you're one of the items on our list, Eddie will spot you coming even before you know you're a one-legged nun in a lobster suit.



FUNK CITY 2039

Made up almost entirely of videogame journalists, Pfister's team was at a disadvantage since many of its members were stuck "working" while my team was several cocktails into the day and surrounded by potential targets. Their name, Funk City 2039, comes from Andrew's second-grade soccer team, which either means he went to school with the raddest 7-year-olds ever, or he's lying and they were called something like the Lady Unicorns.

ANDREW PFISTER - TEAM CAPTAIN

PRIMARY ABILITY: SUPERSTRENGTH
SECONDARY ABILITY: ENCYCLOPEDIC KNOWLEDGE OF POISON LYRICS

Andrew's general approach to problem solving is to clap his hands together to create a shock wave that renders his enemies unconscious. And since most of his photos were of unconscious bleeding people, I assume this was also his approach to scavenger hunting.



CINDY LUM

PRIMARY ABILITY: DIPLOMACY
SECONDARY ABILITY: UNDERWATER VEHICULAR OPERATION

Cindy is a veteran scavenger hunter and the managing editor for *Xbox Nation*. Due to my political correctness and sensitivity, I sometimes go up to her and go, "Bing ching lingbong lo duk sai bing BONG!!!" and then excitedly ask her what I just said. Hahahaha!



DARREN GLADSTONE

PRIMARY ABILITY: LONE WOLF COMMANDO
SECONDARY ABILITY: LOVES COCKTAILS

An editor for *CGW* and instrumental in Funk City 2039's success, Darren worked independently from his teammates. This multifronted photographic assault on the convention was a brilliant maneuver that scavenger-hunt tacticians will study for years.



KATHLEEN SANDERS

PRIMARY ABILITY: T
SECONDARY ABILITY: A

A total gamer grrl and our pal, Kathleen and her fiancé, David, went after their photo targets hard and fast, as if their lives depended on it. And since the losing team is going to be sacrificed to Photor The Blarg, they totally did.



DEMIAN LINN

PRIMARY ABILITY: COUNTER SCAVENGER HUNT MANEUVERS
SECONDARY ABILITY: BOMB DISPOSAL

An editor and photographer for *EGM*, Demian specialized in antiscavenger hunting. He didn't get too many pictures on his own; instead, he focused on making sure we couldn't get ours. At one point he actually jumped up and dangled himself from my arm in that capacity.



SEANBABY VS. PFISTER PICTURES BY MELISSA BARNES

ROUND ONE: THE HUNT IS ON!

The first seven items on the list are each worth five points, with bonus points being possible if the team's photo is judged to have gone above and beyond. No more than one clever technicality is allowed. For example, if you needed to find a picture of 14 cheerleaders fighting over Pfister's underwear, you could get all cute and take a picture of a drawing of that. However, this type of lameness is frowned upon, and a second violation means a loss of points.

2 FAST 2 COURTEOUS



BOOTH BABE GIVING FINGER

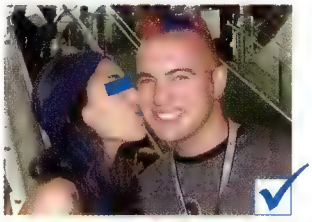
Because they're representatives for a company, there are a lot of things booth babes aren't allowed to do. Luckily, they don't know this. I'm not saying booth babes are dumb—they're just models that got hired that morning who don't know and could not care less what the hell a BloodRayne is. The girl I got pretended it was her first time and actually asked me, "I just *giggle!* lift my middle finger like this?" Please. You're wearing hot pants and a bra and holding a machine gun next to Mad Max's dune buggy. They didn't find you at church.

Bonus! Darren went crazy with this category and got about 10 versions of it. I don't know if he asked them or just heckled them until they made rude gestures, but whatever; bonus point for team Funk City 2039.

FUNK CITY 2039





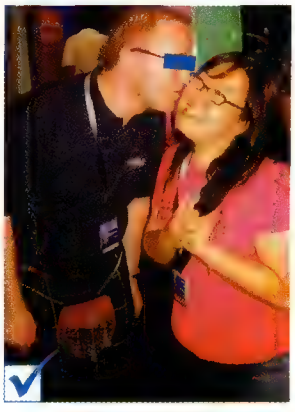


BOOTH BABE KISSING MEMBER

This is a true story I was told at this year's E3: A booth babe told a group of men to smell a spot on her upper arm, and their reaction was all, "My God, that smells awful." She agreed and said that was the exact spot where all of the gamers' armpits touched her while they were posing for pictures. So it's no surprise that the booth babes wouldn't be excited about putting any parts of an E3 attendee's body in their mouth. However, Caroline's espionage in pretending to be my apologetic girlfriend took the edge off of us asking this strange woman into making out with half of my face. Team Funk City 2039 took a unique approach to solving this scavenger-hunt problem when they got the Scottish Gaming Alliance's booth babe, this dude in a skirt, to kiss Cindy, who's got to taste like heaven compared to those loaves of sheep intestines he and his countrymen call food.



Bonus! I ran into my friend Katie from the Suicide Girls, who had just quit her first booth-babe gig, claiming the *Leisure Suit Larry 5* T-shirt was too stupid to wear in front of people. So a bonus point goes to my team for getting smooched by not only a booth babe, but also a disgruntled, off-duty pin-up girl booth babe.





MALE ASS CLEAVAGE

Everyone involved in the competition had been to E3 at least a few times, and we all thought this would be the easiest target. With all the overweight slobs sitting in lines to watch footage of *Half-Life 2*'s incredible mattress-rendering engine, we dismissed this category as if ass cracks would literally jump out of pants and smile for our cameras. Well, we found that the only time you actually see male ass cleavage is when you're not looking for it. This was the last thing either team found, and you'd be amazed at how many hours of the convention we grown men and women spent actively looking for and discussing the top few inches of gamer asses.

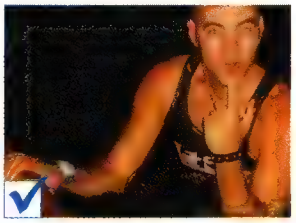
Bonus! Gabby and I captured this butt crack shot 3 minutes and 28 seconds after E3 had officially ended, but since I make the rules, this violation of them is totally legal. It seems ethical, however, to at least award Team FC2039 a bonus point for our foul. Plus, check out the deep ravine of their ass cleavage. You could lead boat tours through that thing.





DARREN/SEANBABY AT AN E3 PARTY, NOT TOUCHING DRINK OR GIRL

Darren likes to drink, and one of my favorite hobbies is disguising myself as a pile of girls. And since every night of E3 is a series of open-bar industry parties filled with beautiful PR women, we challenged one another to a gentlemanly duel of capturing the other with neither. Bryan and I managed to catch Darren at the GameSpot party drinkless and girlless, but to his credit, it was his fourth party of the night, 3 in the morning, and he was actually reaching for a girl as we took it. Demian got this shot of me at the Ziff Davis party after I, like an amateur, got so tore-up that I forgot to hold on to my cocktail when I jumped into the pool.



2 FAST 2 COURTEOUS

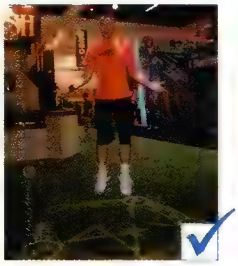


FUNK CITY 2039



FANBOY WITH CONTROLLER RESTING ON BELLY

This was the gimme of the competition. Everywhere we looked we saw gamers playing the hottest upcoming games with the controller resting on the shelf of their distended bellies. Whether it's for comfort, warmth, or simply fatigue, this phenomenon leads to a serious environmental problem. By the end of the convention, these controllers are considered biohazardous, and no matter how they're disposed of, the smell of salty, rotten meat they give off attracts scavengers from up to 40 miles away. And although the yellow-headed vulture is not an endangered species, the choking hazard posed by discarded, belly-flavored, GameCube controller cords is doing its best to change that.





PROOF OF THE SUPERNATURAL

The supernatural is no easy thing to prove. Bigfoot's been trying to do it for years by leaving his footprints all over the countryside, and there are people out there who still aren't arming their homes with Bigfoot traps. For Funk City 2039's proof, Darren got a picture of this fat guy in a jester's cap doing the Jean-Claude Van Damme splits on a stage in front of two bikini girls in wrestling belts, and a thing like that doesn't happen without some kind of black magic getting involved. Team 2 Fast 2 Courteous made the case that there exist powers beyond our understanding by documenting me—holy Jesus, that's me—levitating above a pentagram! They tell me that seconds later everyone within a 100-foot radius of me exploded into spiders, but I was too busy giving birth to venom-spitting death babies to notice.





GIRL ONLY THERE FOR BOYFRIEND

Girls don't play videogames. If you see a girl at E3, she's either paid to be there or her boyfriend brought her along to hold his backpack while he plays *Mega Man X28*. I mean, look at the body language of that bored, impatient girlfriend Gabby sneaked up on. She might as well be holding up a neon sign that says, "Hurry up and finish your stupid nerd crap so we can go." I hope that guy's enjoying his *Viewtiful Joe 2*, because he's not enjoying his woman tonight. Darren took this photo of a girl who literally had to grab hold of her boyfriend's arm since he'd forgotten about her and would have wandered slack-jawed into videogame wonderland without her.

FINAL SCORE FOR ROUND ONE: **2 FAST 2 COURTEOUS: 36 POINTS** **FUNK CITY 2039: 37 POINTS**

ROUND TWO: THE GAME CHANGES

It's no longer about checking something off a list. Each of the remaining six photos compete directly against the opposing team's same photo for control of its five points. So, for example, if the target is Ugliest Donkey Basketball Team and one team enters a picture of a very handsome donkey basketball team, they might only get one point while the team with the unpresentable donkey athletes takes the remaining four. If you're familiar with numbers up to five, you should be able to follow along.

2 FAST 2 COURTEOUS



FUNK CITY 2039



WORST BROKEN ENGRISH

2 FAST 2 COURTEOUS: 1 POINT FUNK CITY 2039: 4 POINTS

Despite the fact that modern telecommunication technology has made it possible to make international phone calls for many decades now, foreign game developers still have yet to think of calling someone who speaks our language to proofread the unintelligible copy they think might be English. With so many exhibitors from Scandinavia, Russia, Japan, and broken-Engrish champions Korea, the teams had trouble picking their representative for this category. My team went with "Flutter with various creatures and colleague, exciting adventure waiting for you," from a Korean MMORPG about God knows what. Team FC2039 found this gamepad monstrosity you strap your cell phone into that proudly claims to be "Not a Just Controller," which is so beyond rad, there's no question who won this one.





FRUITIEST GAME

2 FAST 2 COURTEOUS: 3 POINTS FUNK CITY 2039: 2 POINTS

Pfister's team selected *Flight of Fancy* as the fruitiest game of the show, a dragon simulator you play by making believe your arms are dragon wings! The creators didn't speak English very well, so when Pfister and I tried to explain to them how awesome their game would be with two-player head-to-head action, we had to pantomime it by getting in each other's faces and flapping our arms. My team's champion fruity game was *XTango: Shuffling Roses*, a ballroom-dancing game for couples. And since we were positive Pfist's team would pick the same game, we formed a human pyramid in our photo for no reason other than to ensure ours would be fruitier. Mission accomplished.

»NEXT: BEST OF SHOW

2 FAST 2 COURTEOUS



FUNK CITY 2039



WORST HAT OR HAIR

2 FAST 2 COURTEOUS: 1 POINT FUNK CITY 2039: 4 POINTS

Eddie spotted this guy in a fuzzy green leprechaun top hat, and he was just wearing it around. Just wearing it around! He wasn't giving away chocolate coins or promoting some kind of Lucky Charms game or anything. We thought we would take this category for sure until we saw that Cindy found a man with a poodle-tight mullet that set the hair movement back 30 years. So sure, our hat friend lost this for us, but there is no shame in losing the bad hat/hair category to that guy, time-traveling Captain Hairdo from the planet Stryper. Congratulations on your find, Funk City 2039.



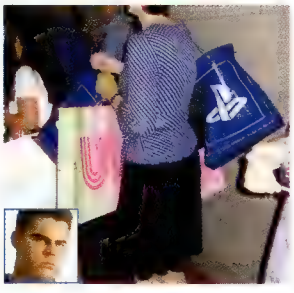


SADDEST BOOTH

2 FAST 2 COURTEOUS: 2 POINTS FUNK CITY 2039: 3 POINTS

The booth we selected was showing nothing but add-ons for 3D-rendering programs, something so boring that I almost fell asleep typing the beginning of this sentence. The exhibitor caught me taking this picture and for all the good it did, he tried to smile. It was clearly the first time he'd tried it in the many hours of sitting alone and waiting for anyone, dear God please anyone, to be interested in adding squiggly rainbows to their computer's cube renderings. For Team FC2039, Darren got this amazing shot of a booth called "Cellphone Games" where the representative sat staring at one of their products...not even playing the damn thing, just silently cursing it for ruining her life. A solid victory—Saddest Booth goes to them.



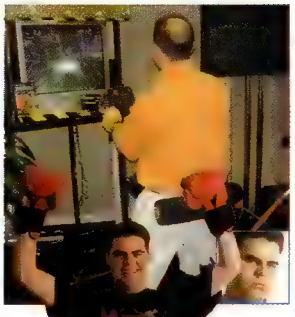


MOST FREEBIES ON A LOSER

2 FAST 2 COURTEOUS: 3 POINTS FUNK CITY 2039: 2 POINTS

On the show floor, a man handing out PlayStation bags offered to let me have one, but only if I said, "PSP!" Hey, eat me, bag distributor. I'm not playing games with you so you can give me a treat of a paper bag filled with junk mail. No one else at the show shared my attitude, though. Most people there were so determined to come home with every single possible free thing, they were walking around with 120 pounds of the exact same annoying pamphlet crap that falls out of magazines while you read them. Stupid light-up pens, cards that say the word "Namco," little beach balls...it would have saved us all a lot of trouble if everyone manufactured their tchotchkes right at the dump and left them there. For this photo, we edged out Team FC2039: While their representative has a few pounds more of free garbage, our guy's jumpsuit shows that he would have had more if he hadn't been so busy piloting his X-wing around all morning.





MOST FROM THE FUTURE!

2 FAST 2 COURTEOUS: 4 POINTS FUNK CITY 2039: 1 POINTS

I received no explanation what this was that Team FC2039 gave me. According to my best guess, and keep in mind I'm only an amateur future scientist, it's a steering-wheel controller and cross-country skiing machine that massages the user's ass while beaming indescribable pleasure directly into their brain. Not bad. But check out the guy Eddie and I found. He had at least 95 cameras and microphones mounted on his body and his Ghostbuster backpack as he broadcast to all known Earth countries. And we're pretty sure that while he was taking this picture with us, he was giving one of his alter-time selves directions as he was adventuring through history, because he shouted into his elbow, "Other-Me #A23! Take a left at the Revolutionary War, and I'll meet you in Feudal Japan in 15 future minutes with Genghis Khan and Milli Vanilli!" Look at that guy. We so won the s**t out of this one.

FINAL SCORE FOR ROUND TWO:	2 FAST 2 COURTEOUS: 14 POINTS FUNK CITY 2039: 16 POINTS

WINNER: FUNK CITY 2039

After three long days of glancing at every waistline in the crowd for signs of butt cleavage, Team Funk City 2039 won the 2004 Great E3 Photo Scavenger Hunt with a final score of 53 to my team's 50. It was a tremendous showing and a deserved victory, but my advice to them is to enjoy it while they can, because the clock is ticking on next year's E3, and 2 Fast 2 Courteous is coming back hard. And if you happen to be there in 2005, you may hear the beep of a digital camera behind you. If so, don't bother pulling your pants up, because I already have a picture of your ass crack.

THIS IS NOT A THIS





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MASSIVE ATTACK

MASSIVELY MULTIPLAYER COMES OF AGE

The massively multiplayer online RPG. *EverQuest* started the trend roughly five years ago. It's the Beatles of persistent online worlds: innovative, original, and most important, influential. Now dozens of pretenders to the throne have emerged to finish what *EverQuest* began. *Final Fantasy XI* is doing brisk business, with its unified audience of both PC and PlayStation 2 players gearing up for the upcoming expansion *Chains of Promathia*. Still, not every online experience has to involve thousands of people, a massive hard drive, or severe dedication to current events. Take games like Capcom's *Monster Hunter*, which ably captures the thrill of four-player team-based action in the context of a monster-infested world. These days, no matter what your preference in online worlds, there's almost certainly something for you. Tired of dungeons and dragons? Maybe *The Matrix Online* will tickle your fancy by jacking you into the places where Neo and Trinity once played. *GMR* offers you a fresh look at some of tomorrow's most promising online games.

MONSTER HUNTER

SYS PS2 PUB CAPCOM DEV CAPCOM REL AUGUST

A LEATHERY, TOOTHY, SPIKY NEW PAIR OF BOOTS



Home to expatriate *Phantasy Star Online* players or simply a place for gamers looking for a party-based experience on PS2? Either way, the mission-based four-player dinosaur-hunting game that is *Monster Hunter*, which ships this August, should provide plenty of excitement and, more specifically, endless customization for gamers. The game, which revolves around a series of tiered mission objectives, brings up to four players together online (*MH* features an offline single-player mode as well) to hunt and harvest skins and materials from fallen monsters and then use them to craft highly individualized types of armor. The early missions find you performing simple objectives, such as killing a certain monster for its hide or stealing a dragon egg to feed your village. Later missions are much more difficult, naturally, but they reward the player with more exotic materials, which are used to create unique armor and weapons. *Monster Hunter* producer Kenji Itsuno tells us, "If you count all the different armor pieces in the game, they number in the hundreds."

That's pretty much the appeal right there. Veterans of games such as *Diablo II* or any MMORPG will understand. The goal to be the most pimped-out player on the block with the gaudiest high-level bling will always be everyone's goal, and *Monster Hunter* satisfies these urges, as evidenced by the game's





THE BEST PART OF EARNING A DEGREE IN THE NAVY?

GETTING TO CLASS.



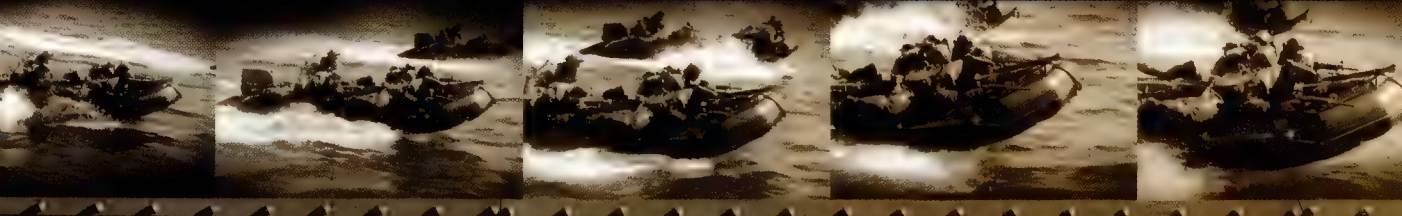


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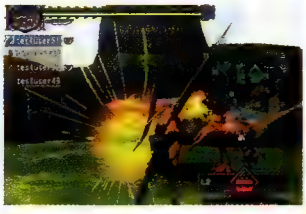
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→ *Monster Hunter* features, among other things, a unique lobby that puts players—decked out in their unique garb—in a medieval tavern of sorts. People can gather here, toast one another over flagons of ale, and organize groups for adventuring. Getting the game's most exotic materials for armor crafting will be achieved most easily through group play.

PS2

surprising success in Japan. With the Japanese release providing a fertile testing ground for what does and doesn't work, North American players reap the benefits of what has essentially been a king-sized focus group. One perk Stateside gamers will enjoy is an expanded inventory system. According to Itsuno, "We really tried our best to implement a lot of the feedback we received. A couple of good examples are a new chat system and a larger storage box at your main camp, since many Japanese gamers found there wasn't enough space to make a bunch of items."

Monster Hunter also features a unique control system that attaches all of the player's attacks to the right analog stick. Itsuno explains why the team decided to design the game in this manner: "We wanted to give the game the feeling of swinging weapons. Albeit, a tiny analog stick may not capture the feeling of swinging a huge sword, but at least it's one step closer than a button." It definitely takes some getting used to, but once you've grown accustomed to the controls, it seems like second nature, especially when swinging one of the game's big broadswords around.

Another feature that puts *Monster Hunter* at the front of the online pack is its photo-realistic graphics, which look as good as nearly anything on GameCube or Xbox. Itsuno explains, "The team has been created by a bunch of veterans that have worked on titles such as *Capcom vs. SNK* and *Jo-Jo's Bizarre Adventure*. The thing that I find most impressive about the graphics is not only did our team go to Europe and take tons of photos to give the game a very realistic feeling, but we have managed to keep the graphic level this high while still keeping the latency level smooth over broadband."

But graphics and collectible items are nothing without great players and a dose of strategy. When asked what sort of party configurations work best in the game (from the selection of job types, such as swordsmen and long-distance gunners), Itsuno simply states, "I would say that you need teamwork. Being a gunner in single-player mode is rough, but a gunner works great for a supporting role in team combat. Having a person set traps and then another distract the monsters while a couple others attack is a great team strategy."

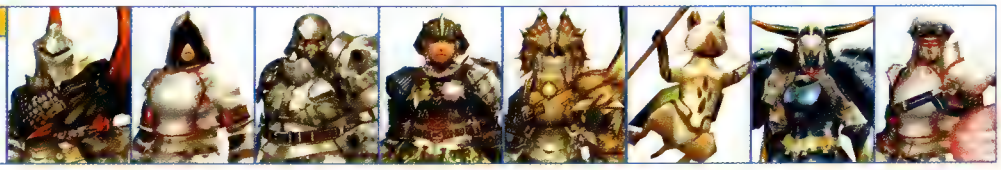
So if you've been looking for an alternative to the gun-crazed ballistics of games such as *SOCOM II* and *Rainbow Six*, *Monster Hunter* might be your (broadband-only) fix for team-based action gaming.

GOOD FOR:

Gamers who want the excitement of cooperative, team-based gameplay but aren't quite ready for the commitment required by full-on MMORPGs and their perpetual environments. *Monster Hunter* picks up the baton that *Phantasy Star Online* dropped when Nintendo muffed the broadband adapter supply chain and offers superior graphics and more innovative gameplay, if not the more recognizable *Phantasy Star* brand.

BE ALL THAT YOU CAN BE

MONSTER HUNTER FEATURES HUNDREDS OF TYPES OF ARMOR AND WEAPONS THAT YOU CAN BUILD, DEPENDING ON WHAT TYPES OF MATERIALS YOU HAVE. THIS IS A SMALL SAMPLE OF THE STYLES AVAILABLE IN MONSTER HUNTER, BUT UNFORTUNATELY, YOU CANNOT BE THE CAT. YOU CAN ONLY BE THE CAT'S FRIEND—UNTIL HE STEALS YOUR MONEY. BAD KITTY!





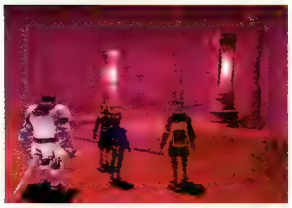
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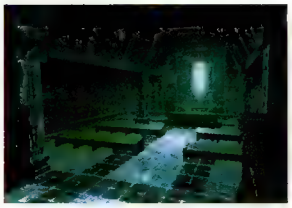
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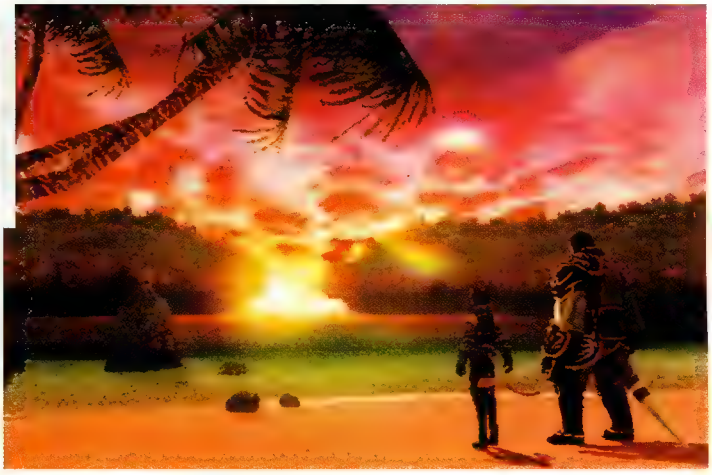
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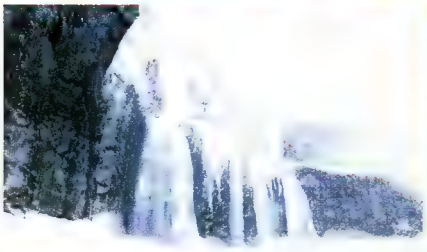
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→ The new sunny, tropical locales in *Chains of Promathia* actually make us want to turn off the PC and go take a vacation. We also think the developers should add a barber shop in the expansion. OK, maybe not.

FINAL FANTASY XI: CHAINS OF PROMATHIA

PC

PS2

☐SYS PC/PS2 ☐PUB SQUARE ENIX ☐DEV SQUARE ENIX ☐REL SEPTEMBER

WORKING THE CHAINS

Despite a rocky debut in Japan, *Final Fantasy XI* has, after two years, finally spread to the rest of the world and quickly taken the No. 2 spot in terms of overall MMORPG subscribers. And the world is getting bigger with *Chains of Promathia*, a new expansion set for simultaneous PC and PS2 release here and in Japan this September.

Much of the new expansion is still shrouded in mystery, in particular the aspect most players want to know about: new job classes. To help satisfy gamers' curiosity, we spoke with Hiromichi Tanaka, producer of *Final Fantasy XI*. Concerning the matter of new jobs, Mr. Tanaka states: "No new jobs will be added at this time." Short and to the point—alas, it seems our blue mage will have to wait for an update.

Also on the short list of questions is whether the level cap will be raised. Again, Tanaka remains coy: "Currently, we do not feel that raising the level cap is necessary for players to fully enjoy all that *Final Fantasy XI* has to offer." He reasons that "cooperating with other adventurers and learning to work within the boundaries of the level cap to accomplish seemingly impossible goals" is just as fun. The unbending Tanaka even declined to comment on the existence of new summons, despite hints already released on the game's official site. When we ask if they'd ever let players summon or own chocobos, Tanaka says, "There are no plans for making a chocobo a summonable avatar. Also, there are no current plans to allow personal ownership of chocobos. However, we are considering the suggestion."

While the usual MMORPG action will ensue, the expansion puts a strong focus on story. Fans of the game will have heard of Promathia, the dark counterpart to the goddess Altana, but Square also introduces a few new characters who fit into this new tale: Prishe, a malevolent-looking elvaan girl, and an unnamed "Enigmatic Youth." Both will figure prominently in the story. Other notable features in the expansion are the mysterious new scenario called "Emptiness" and the addition of airship combat, which will open exciting new gameplay dynamics.

Promathia will feature 40 new areas to explore, four of which have been revealed thus far. Those who have completed their white mage artifact quests may have heard of one of the areas, the Tavnazian Archipelago. An island chain leveled during the Great War, it's now a picturesque overgrown pirate hangout. On the other end of the spectrum is Attohwa Chasm, a vast canyon frontier with a scorching climate and volcanic tendencies. In addition to these overworld areas, two new underground areas have been revealed: Movalpolos is a large steampunk city run by those adorable goblins and Pso'Xja (pronounced "Soh-Jah") is a vast ruin that features magical platforms and pictures of summon monsters. While it's yet to be revealed how these specific areas figure into the game, Tanaka says these new regions will support "players as low as level 20," but some areas will be "so dangerous that only the highest-level adventurers dare set foot within them." Hopefully, the former will include alternatives to the overcrowded Qufim and Kazham areas.

With the game's strong U.S. following currently getting their characters up to speed, Tanaka assures us that Square will "constantly provide something new and innovative through version updates," making *Chains of Promathia* high on our wish list for online gaming.

GOOD FOR:

Fans of the *Final Fantasy* series, for one. Anyone who finds comfort in summons like Ifrit and Shiva, and spells like Firaga, Blizzaga, and Curaga, well, this is what you need. It's also good for people turned off by the prototypical elves, trolls, and goblins milieu ingrained in the minds of Western designers raised on pen-and-paper RPGs like *Dungeons & Dragons*. *FFXI*'s deep and balanced gameplay is built to hang tough with new contenders like *City of Heroes*.











→ In *EverQuest II*, you don't lose experience or levels when you die (ahem, get a clue, *FFXI*!). Instead, you leave behind a bit of your spirit (right). Until you reclaim your spirit (which leaves behind a good-looking corpse, actually), your powers are weakened by around 20 percent and won't return to full strength until you find your lost essence. Once you get it back, however, you can go about your merry way, leveling up as you will.



EVERQUEST II

☐SYS PC ☐PUB SONY ONLINE ENTERTAINMENT ☐DEV SONY ONLINE ENTERTAINMENT ☐REL SEPTEMBER

PC

THE SECOND COMING

It's been roughly half a decade since the original *EverQuest* single-handedly carved out a whole new genre called the massively multiplayer online role-playing game. Considering the number of imitators that have moved in to cut themselves a slice of the pie, it's heartening to see—after countless expansion packs—a bona fide sequel to the game that started it all.

In *EQ2*, the warring nations of Qeynos and Freeport are at it again, albeit 500 years after the events of the original *EverQuest*. What this means is that *EverQuest* veterans will not be able to transfer their original characters (although they will be able to continue all their SOE-related gaming under one umbrella account), but in the grand scheme of things, this is a good thing. After five years of fine-tuning its own game, listening to user feedback, and watching various trends and design innovations emerge in the genre, SOE has been able to sit back and design what it hopes is the be-all and end-all MMORPG.

For starters, instead of having to seek out remotely situated NPCs and harass them for quests, characters in *EQ2* will be sought out for quests according to their relative skill level. Let's say you're a high-level high elf scout walking through the peaceful community of Castleview Hamlet. If an NPC has a quest suitable for your skill level, he'll approach you with details of the mission. This saves players from scouring the Internet, trying to figure out how to progress.

That's just the tip of the iceberg. *EverQuest II* reads like a greatest hits of MMORPG dynamics wrapped up in a glossy candy wrapper. Unlike *FFXI*'s mog house, *EQ2* will offer players their own starter apartment (you begin the game as a refugee on an Ellis Island *EQ* equivalent), which can later be upgraded in a house that other players can visit. In fact, players can even specialize in job classes that let you build houses for other players.

Transportation is another perk that gamers will be able to enjoy. Moving around Norrath can be done via the regular method of trudging through the wilderness (various speed buffs can make the going to and fro easier) or by more luxurious methods such as riding horseback (you can actually buy your own horse in *EQ2*) or flying carpets.

In terms of employment and craft skills, players can choose from various artisan subclasses, such as smiths (weaponsmiths, armorsmiths), crafters (furniture, leathercrafts), or scholars (sages, alchemists), to create the items traded and sold in the game. Of course, if you prefer to evangelize the more generic culinary and beverage arts, you can brew your own beer (your guild can become famous for its suds), which has various beneficial effects on players who use it (including, seriously, blurry vision).

The world, which benefits from both photo-realistic graphics and context-dependent orchestration (composer Laura Karpman has scored 90 minutes of original music for *EQ2*), also features extensive voice acting. Even such bit players as a crotchety old man feeding the ducks will utter phrases like "Stay away from my ducks, kitty!" But this dialogue points to an even bigger enhancement: a world teeming with life. In the past, stoic NPCs may have been good enough for most people, but not the *EQ2* team. Events and actions of consequence, no matter how big or small, take place all the time in the game. SOE hopes to saturate gamers in the atmosphere of this beautifully constructed game.

Naturally, the big appeal in an MMORPG is pimping out your character and impressing your peers. In this aspect, *EQ2* knows no bounds. Offering seven visible changes to each character depending on what you equip (helms, gloves, armor, etc.), *EQ2* multiplies that by 80 different suits of armor, robes, assassins' gear, and jewelry. You'll know a high-level fighter the instant one walks in the room.

There is way too much to *EQ2* to detail in brief here, so be sure to check back for our continued coverage of what may be the most exciting entry into the MMORPG genre that *EverQuest* itself invented.

GOOD FOR:

Fans of MMORPGs who prefer classic *Dungeons & Dragons*–style character types to *Final Fantasy XI*'s anime-dipped elvaan babes and tater-tot-sized tarutarus. *EQ2* is also a great visual showcase for gamers with hot-rod PC rigs—the graphics offered in this RPG are far beyond anything else in the genre rendered in real time. Five years ago, one look at *EverQuest II*, and you would have thought you were looking at *Myst*. It's *that* good-looking.



→ No, you're not witnessing a virtual reenactment of *Saturday Night Fever*'s pivotal dance-off (below). This is just a typical day at the races in the *Matrix Online*. It just so happens some folk prefer fitted vests over long, black trench coats. Change is good. Believe it.



THE MATRIX ONLINE

PC

SYS PC PUB SEGA DEV MONOLITH REL NOVEMBER

WELCOME TO THE DESERT OF THE REAL

Being a designer on *The Matrix Online* is a little like being at bat with a full count: Strike one is the preponderance of MMOs already on the market, and strike two is the spotty perception that *Matrix*-branded videogames have in the minds of gamers these days. But if the pressure's on, then there's all the more incentive for Toby Ragaini's team at Monolith to deliver something special.

"There's no equivalent to killing rats in *The Matrix Online*," Ragaini states adamantly, and players fearing something like the Jedi lockout in *Star Wars Galaxies* have nothing to worry about, either. "As soon as you begin, you are an operative who has capabilities that normal people in the Matrix don't." Every player starts as a "red pill," or newly awakened initiate into Zion, although there's nothing to stop you from straying from your newfound friends. "You're approached by operatives from both the machines and the Merovingian," Ragaini explains, "and they're trying to convince you to work for them. They realize that humans who have these capabilities are very useful." So while you can't play as an Agent, "you do have an opportunity to choose which side you're going to be on."

In one sense, the three sides act as a kind of alignment system—think of Zion as good, the machines as evil, and the Merovingian as neutral, though things are a little more complicated than that. Both the humans and the Merovingian are interested in living life, while both the machines and the Merovingian are determined to protect the Matrix. In gameplay terms, though you'll be a human no matter which side you choose, the three organizations will all offer abilities and powers unique to that faction.

Beyond that, though, there's no rigid order to character growth. "Instead of having to, say, pick a character class, we have a much more open-ended model where players can try out capabilities and customize their characters according to their individual style," Ragaini says. The skills system will be familiar to anyone who saw Neo learn kung fu in a couple of seconds back in the first movie: Players will accumulate a library of programs that they can load while in the Construct before entering the Matrix proper, and these programs determine the abilities and special moves they have inside the system.

Exactly how special moves work is still a bit of a mystery, but regular combat should be familiar to anyone who's seen the movies. "Typically, MMO combat is sort of 'I hit you, you hit me.' So what we've done is create this thing called Interlock. It's essentially tightly coupled animations where every punch and every block and every kick is lined up with a specific target on the opposing character. So that when you do a punch combo, your opponent will either get hit several times exactly where your punches land, or he will block and weave and duck in accordance with where the individual attacks fell." The mechanics determining what connects and what doesn't are invisible "so that what the player sees is a very smooth combat experience without any interruptions."

All this happens in the anonymous urban sprawl presented in the movies, populated by familiar characters, who'll show up under specialized circumstances. The team is working closely with the Wachowskis to ensure that the game carries the movies' stamp of authenticity—a refrain we've heard before, but Monolith has a better recent track record than certain other development teams. Could *The Matrix Online* be the One after all?

GOOD FOR:

Tech-heads who want something set in the future, as opposed to the medieval past. *The Matrix Online* will attempt to rejuvenate the once-promising brand hammered by critical drubbings of both the final two *Matrix* movies and the moribund *Enter the Matrix* videogame. Finally, players can decide for themselves whether they'll take the blue pill or the red pill. As for us, we prefer Advil. It helps us get through deadlines more easily.







→ New character races will offer gamers who are just getting started an even wider choice to select from. Of course, veteran players can simply hop on board with their pre-existing saved characters.

CHAMPIONS: RETURN TO ARMS

☐SYS PS2 ☐PUB SONY ☐DEV SNOWBLIND STUDIOS ☐REL Q1 2005

ARMED AND READY

Fans of this year's hack-n-slash adventure *Champions of Norrath* are in for another treat with Snowblind Studios' ambitious follow-up, *Champions: Return to Arms*. This time around, you're tasked with retrieving the fragments of the fallen god Innoruuk, aligning yourself with either the forces of good or evil as you quest across a dozen planes in search of his scattered shards.

Players of the first *Champions* can import their characters from the previous game, continuing their careers up to level 80. Five difficulty settings compensate for your skill, and you can even play through the game multiple times, experiencing both the good and evil paths.

The five characters from the original *Champions* return with a few obligatory additions to their powers, and this time, they're joined by two new classes. The reptilian iksar shaman is an offensive spellcaster, capable of summoning a spiritual badger pet and growing to ridiculous proportions to smite his enemies. The vah shir berserker is a feline powerhouse who mixes his penchant for ranged attacks with a number of damage-enhancing bloodlust abilities.

Whether you're importing or starting from scratch, *Return to Arms* aims to offer plenty of freedom and flexibility. Gone are the randomly seeded dungeons of the original *Champions*, replaced here with a set of static—and much more coherent—areas. Players are free to revisit finished levels, and a set of goal-oriented "medal round" side quests offer some pretty enticing loot rewards.

Fans of online play have another reason to get excited: *Return to Arms* features a PVP arena, allowing up to four players to enter the fray in a trio of cooperative and versus modes. A central lobby is also being implemented, making online matchups easier for both the standard and PVP game modes.

Lastly, the game looks spectacular, and we've been told it will run at a constant, smooth 60 frames per second. Arm up, kids—and get ready for another dazzling, action-packed *EQ* experience come 2005.

GOOD FOR:

Gamers who want a quick bite of that multiplayer action without overly long hours required to enjoy it. *Champions of Norrath* is great at providing quick, *Diablo*-style hack-n-slash action without the commitment demanded by MMORPGs. The improved lobby interface (read: it has one) will be a big improvement, enabling players to meet up and organize their parties more deliberately, and less like a random game of chance.

STAR WARS GALAXIES: JUMP TO LIGHTSPEED

☐SYS PC ☐PUB LUCASARTS ☐DEV SONY ONLINE ENTERTAINMENT ☐REL FALL

STAY ON TARGET!

While last year's massively multiplayer *Star Wars Galaxies: An Empire Divided* was embraced by legions of rabid geeks eager for a deep-dish *Star Wars* experience, it was missing two critical things: the stars and the wars. The glaring lack of space combat and player-owned ships, once a major strike against the game, is being remedied in the upcoming space expansion *Jump to Lightspeed*. This ain't like dusting crops, kid—buckle up and get ready to fly.

In *Jump to Lightspeed*, you'll have the opportunity to purchase your very own spacecraft, choosing from 15 ships that range from the Rebels' famous X-wing fighters to large YT-1300 freighter ships—that's the *Millennium Falcon*'s make and model, for all of you normal folks out there. There are even a few TIE fighter variations, for those who dig the evil Empire.

But of course, a ship needs a pilot, and three new pilot professions are available for players to pursue: one each for the Rebel and Imperial factions, as well as a privateer—a neutral free agent (think Han Solo). You'll pilot your craft through 10 new space zones, travel between planets via hyperspace waypoints, and engage in twitch-based combat that brings back memories of X-wing versus TIE fighter. There are also more than 100 different missions to tackle, from simple escort assignments to all-out capital ship raids.

Spaceships will require maintenance over time, which is what the new shipwright profession is all about. These handymen can customize your craft using parts that are looted during space battles, and they can even reverse-engineer components to create superior upgrades. Repair droids, a variety of weapon add-ons, and distinctive aesthetic tweaks are just a few of the things that shipwrights can provide.

For you MMO haters out there, 99 percent of the game is space based, meaning that anyone who doesn't care about the ground game can largely disregard it—which is great news for the Wedge Antilles wannabes among us. Time to kick back, enjoy the flight, and jump to *Lightspeed*.

GOOD FOR:

Star Wars fans, naturally, who are less interested in being a Cantina dancer and more in the Space Pilot action. Burned by the extreme trials required to become a Jedi in *Star Wars Galaxies? Jump to Lightspeed* lets players hang out in the intergalactic trade routes indefinitely, making it a fine alternative for those who want to keep their game going, as well as those who'd rather skip the ground-based missions.

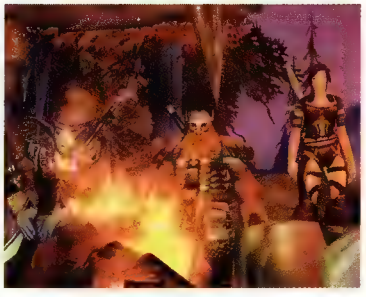
→ An MMORPG in which we get to fly around and blow stuff up all day in lieu of killing voracious rabbits? Sign us up! Players can bankroll their ground-based efforts by gunning down pirates in space. That's rad.







→ This is not *My Little Pony* come to life in an MMORPG. It's just one of the means of transportation in *World of WarCraft*. Rogues gain the ability to ride tigers in their later levels, and we're totally psyched about that.



WORLD OF WARCRAFT BETA UPDATE

☐SYS PC ☐PUB VIVENDI ☐DEV BLIZZARD ☐REL FALL

IN WITH THE NEW

It's common knowledge that Blizzard does right by any genre in which it chooses to create a game. Given our time spent with the beta version of *World of WarCraft*, this seems to hold true in the MMORPG category. While it's going against some heavy hitters, both released and soon-to-be released, it looks like Blizzard is holding it down quite ably. It would be premature to say things like "Blizzard will dominate this genre like it has all others," but one thing seems pretty sure: Those of you who like your MMORPGs as *Diablo*-like as possible (i.e., quick and dirty) will dig this.

A recent patch (released in mid-April) made every race and all but one of the character classes available to beta testers. To get a feel for the magnitude of this, consider the following: At the outset, we were allowed to play only as the "good" alliance races—humans, gnomes, dwarves, and night elves. Now, the whole spread is available, including all the "evil" horde races—orcs, tauren, undead, and trolls. It's not only a matter of character type, though; since all these races have their own starting cities, as well as unique quests, their inclusion has given us much more of a solid feel for the game's thematic whole. Blizzard seems to put big priority on charging the worlds it creates with a substantial level of character, and this is very much evident in the new beta content.

Just as exciting as the new races is the addition of a new character class—druids. Just like their *WarCraft 3* and, to an extent, *Diablo 2* counterparts, druids are masters of shape shifting, able to turn into crazy, sometimes vicious animals depending on what the situation calls for. These include bears and pantherlike cats for combat, fish-type things for traversing bodies of water, and cheetahs for hauling ass on the ground. Druids are also a very powerful support character, with their buffs being among the most powerful available.

All the new content in the last update makes *World of WarCraft* feel that much more like a finished game. It's damn close already, and we're thinking it'll get only tighter and more substantial as it nears release. Now, how about some freaking auction houses already? Camping the trade channels is getting old.

GOOD FOR:

Anyone who's ever enjoyed the legacy and lore of Blizzard's bread-and-butter series: *WarCraft*. The game captures that same classic Blizzard humor (check the night elves' female skanky dance emote—hilarious!) while offering the deep, layered experience the company's games are known for. While the comic relief was a little overbearing for our tastes initially, the game takes on more serious tones the deeper your mission list becomes.

NOW

Some notes before you dive in: We were originally planning to review both *Lineage II* and *Driver 3* this month, but we couldn't get enough time with either game for a thorough review. Wait For It: Next issue. No matter, because there are a ton of great (some surprisingly so) games this month. We now return to our regularly scheduled programming....

HOW WE RATE

WARNING!! WHERE MULTIPLE VERSIONS OF A GAME ARE REVIEWED, *GMA* WILL MENTION DIFFERENCES ONLY IF THEY SIGNIFICANTLY AFFECT THE GAMEPLAY.

YOUR GUIDE TO THE GMA SCORING SYSTEM

1 AWFULNESS 2 DASTARDLY 3 PITIFUL 4 OOPS 5 AVERAGE 6 GOOD STUFF 7 RECOMMENDED 8 EXCELLENT 9 TOTALLY SICK 10 TIMELESS CLASSIC

REVIEWED THIS ISSUE:

BUJINGAI: THE FORSAKEN CITY	PS2	100
THE CHRONICLES OF RIDDICK	XB	090
CITY OF HEROES	PC	087
FULL SPECTRUM WARRIOR	XB	098
HARRY POTTER AND THE PRISONER OF AZKABAN	GC/PS2/XB	093
HARRY POTTER AND THE PRISONER OF AZKABAN	GBA	093
KARAOKE REVOLUTION VOL. 2	PS2	091
MEGA MAN ANNIVERSARY COLLECTION	GC/PS2	091
MEGA MAN BATTLE NETWORK 4	GBA	089
MLB SLUGFEST: LOADED	PS2/XB	096
N-GAGE QD	N-GAGE	094
PSI-OPS: THE MINDGATE CONSPIRACY	PS2/XB	092
SHADOW OPS: RED MERCURY	XB	096
SMASH COURT PRO TENNIS 2	PS2	089
SONIC ADVANCE 3	GBA	091
TALES OF SYMPHONIA	GC	099
THIEF: DEADLY SHADOWS	PC	101
WAY OF THE SAMURAI 2	PS2	100







→ What would a superhero game be without the ability to fly? It takes a while to get to the required level, but it makes city travel so much faster.





CITY OF HEROES

YOU WILL BELIEVE A GAME CAN FLY

TEEN | PC

PUBLISHER: NCSOFT
DEVELOPER: CRYPTIC STUDIOS
PRICE: $39.99
$14.95 MONTHLY FEE
RELEASE: AVAILABLE NOW
PLAYERS MASSIVE!
ORIGIN: U.S.A.

Playing an MMORPG used to mean that you had to roleplay a medieval dandy of some sort who runs with dwarves and kills magical rabbits for loot. The genre has slowly broadened its horizons with sci-fi games such as *Anarchy Online* and *Star Wars Galaxies* and non-Western games like *FFXI*. Finally, though, Cryptic decided to mine the most creative and complementary medium for gaming: the comic book.

In fact, the most fun part of *COH* happens before you even see the game world: character creation. After starting with origins such as science (like Spider-Man) or natural (like Batman) and five archetypes (blasters, tankers, etc.), you proceed to craft your unique look using hundreds of faces, costume pieces, and colors. While other games might claim a diverse array of characters, no two characters look alike in *COH*. You can make a tempting female in a skintight costume, a massive automaton bristling with death rays, or a simple businessman with a plan. With the huge array of options and powers, one could spend hours turning character concepts into (virtual) reality.

Gameplay is focused on the tried-and-true "go kill things to level up so that you can kill things faster" standard. The entire game world is contained within Paragon City and its many districts. Right on the street, thugs, robots, Nazi-esque soldiers, and Mafiosi menace citizens—you can easily run (or fly) around the city, stopping crimes in progress. If you need a little more structure, you can ask your NPC contacts to give you missions in randomly generated dungeons. These missions usually consist of defeating a lot of foes or finding some supervillain doohickey. Finally, there are also task-force missions, which are a string of connected team missions that usually culminate in a massive battle against significant villains—consider these the equivalent of multi-issue story arcs.

Solo play is hit or miss (depending on what kind of character you use), but the teamplay is quite sublime. The





→ Because characters specialize in different things, teaming up is sometimes necessary.

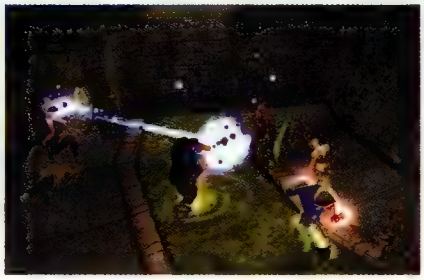
[HERO SAMMICH]

YOU'RE SUCH A CHARACTER!

We have to salute the sheer creativity of the various denizens of Paragon City. While there are way too many Wolverine and Hulk clones, there are also plenty of humorous and straightforward heroes out there. Current pop-culture characters like *Kill Bill*'s The Bride and *Saturday Night Live*'s Ambiguously Gay Duo have been replicated; there are also pun-filled creations like Count Sheep and Captain Obvious. Our favorite is comic artist Jason Lutes' creation: Pirate Ninjabot.









various character archetypes and powers complement one another extremely well, and good teamwork necessitates good communication and coordination. While it might seem obvious that an MMORPG is better when played with others, it's extremely significant here. Even if you and your buddies are several levels apart, you can use *COH*'s ingenious Sidekick system to have the lower-level player hitch along with the higher-level one and still gain XP.

COH's pure focus on superhero combat is both its mightiest trait and its most crippling weakness. While the fighting is easily the most interesting combat around, it's also pretty much the only thing you can do. There's no crafting, trade, housing, PVP, or loot—it's just you (or your buddies) fighting creatures over and over and over. Sure, superheroics don't really call for random acts of tailoring, but veteran MMORPGers who want more than just combat might find *COH* off-putting. And the lack of PVP means that you can't engage in titanic JLA/Avengers-style brouhahas with other players (until *City of Villains* comes out). Finally, man alive, does it take a long time to level up once you're past level 12 or so (it's also a bit silly that you're forced to find an NPC in order to actually level up, rather than get your powers right away).

Whether you're a fan of postmodern 21st-century superheroes such as The Authority or good ol' fashioned icons such as Superman or Spider-Man, *City of Heroes* is a refreshing take on the MMORPG genre. It doesn't quite have the depth or the legs to carry it into longevity like an *EverQuest* or a *Final Fantasy*, but that's for later patches and expansions. Right now, it's your best (and only) chance to become the next Superman.

_Thierry Nguyen

GMR TIGHTS 8/10

BETTER THAN STAR WARS GALAXIES
NOT AS DEEP AS: FINAL FANTASY XI
WAIT FOR IT: CITY OF VILLAINS

2ND OPINION

It is possible to be a lone wolf in Paragon City, coming and going as you please, but the game becomes multiple times more fun when you team up with friends in a supergroup. This is an outstanding social game with plenty to do...we'll just have to wait and see how long that lasts.

_Andrew Pfister

MEGA MAN BATTLE NETWORK 4: RED SUN & BLUE MOON

KICKING ASS AND TAKING CHIPS

EVERYONE | GBA

When Capcom finds something that works, it milks it for all it's worth, often to the point of overkill. The *Mega Man* series is usually a good example. But unlike previous incarnations, the *Battle Network* series is still going strong, even after its fourth release.

Just as before, you control a young kid, Lan, and his cyber ego, Mega Man, in a hybrid RPG/action/strategy title. As Lan, you run around various towns to gather clues and items. As Mega Man, you scour the Net for viruses to eradicate. Combat relies on both quick reflexes and effective management of battle chips, which grant numerous offensive and defensive abilities. Those familiar with the series will know what to expect. The story is fun to follow and never drags. The catchy music is never tiresome and helps to establish the series' whimsical tone.

The always-solid battle engine benefits from several additions, such as the Soul Unison system, which allows Mega Man to gain attributes from friends and foes alike. There are actually two versions of the same game, each with its own unique story line and souls to untie, which can be acquired only by trading with players of the other color.

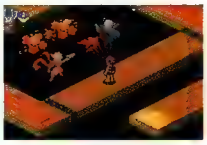
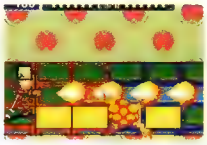
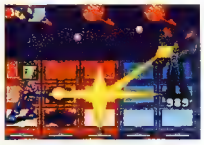
If there's one complaint, it's the visuals. They're not bad, just more or less the same visuals we've seen since part one. The series is in need of an immediate graphics overall. Otherwise, Capcom's getting the formula just right.

_Matthew Hawkins

PUB CAPCOM
DEV CAPCOM
REL AVAILABLE NOW
PRICE $29.99
PLAYERS 1-2
ORIGIN JAPAN

GMR BROADBAND 8/10

BETTER THAN: RHAPSODY
NOT AS GOOD AS: DISGAEA
WAIT FOR IT: PHANTOM BRAVE


SMASH COURT PRO TENNIS 2

NOT WITHOUT FAULTS

EVERYONE | PS2




PUB NAMCO
DEV NAMCO
REL AVAILABLE NOW
PRICE $39.99
PLAYERS 1-2
ORIGIN JAPAN

GMR LET 6/10

NOT AS RED AS: MARIO'S TENNIS (VIRTUAL BOY)
NOT AS GOOD AS: TOP SPIN
WAIT FOR IT: MARIO TENNIS GC

To get the comparisons immediately out of the way, Namco's *Smash Court Pro Tennis 2* is neither Sega's classic *Virtua Tennis* nor Microsoft's stellar *Top Spin*. It is, in fact, a more technical take on tennis—or at least it tries to be.

What sets the aforementioned competition apart is their excellent and intuitive control; this is *Smash Court*'s defining shortcoming. Players often won't extend or dive for easily reachable balls, there's no option to charge a shot when in position, and animations transition awkwardly from running to stroke. And if that wasn't enough, the "nice" power shots happen at a completely unnatural bounce and angle—what you might consider to be a perfectly timed shot will arc harmlessly toward your waiting adversary. Of course, for those who find arcade-style tennis too lenient, *Smash Court*'s demanding standards might be more appropriate. All of the standard modes and options are available, there's a nice roster of male and female pro players to choose from, and aside from the control issues, it's technically competent.

Smash Court also has an interesting pro career mode: You create a character, assign attribute points, and go through training drills, but you never actually play a full match against an opponent. Tournaments are broken down into event-based games that determine the winner of an entire set. It's a great option if you don't have the time to play through an entire tournament the traditional way.

Virtua Tennis and *Top Spin* go for both casual and hardcore players simultaneously, while *Smash Court* only really caters to the latter. And even if you fall into that group, it takes concerted effort to find the fun.

_Andrew Pfister









→ The prudent killer can't, in good mind, wield a weapon unless it 1) conveniently tracks ammunition spent (to prevent wastefulness) and 2) emits a light source powerful enough to dig his own shadow. *Riddick* has no shortage of pretty light sources, as you can see in these shots, but the more, the merrier.

XB

CHRONICLES OF RIDDICK

THE FUTURE IS ACTUALLY QUITE BRIGHT

MATURE | XB

PUBLISHER: VIVENDI UNIVERSAL
DEVELOPER: STARBREEZE STUDIOS
PRICE: $39.99
RELEASE: AVAILABLE NOW
PLAYERS: 1
ORIGIN: SWEDEN

Regardless of whether or not you know about *Chronicles of Riddick*'s theatrical legacy, know this: This game deserves your love and respect. Yeah, it "stars" Vin Diesel, but love him or hate him, his current vehicle for interactive stardom is, as they say, the bee's knees.

The game is, at its core, a first-person shooter, but one that's paced like a *KOTOR*-style RPG. And as hard as it is to believe, it succeeds marvelously at both of its bipolar aspects. The action elements are brilliant: Intricate physics make the world come alive, smart enemies make it deadly, and transparently implemented stealth elements make it tense and realistic at the same time. Meanwhile, branching paths allow you to accomplish goals in varying ways; tight, well-written (and believably delivered) dialogue draws you into the world; and a simple, revenge-driven story makes you give a crap about it all.

Developer Starbreeze Studios has also implemented into *Riddick* an excellent hand-to-hand combat system. Whether you're barehanded or gripping a shiv, tearing into your enemies up close and personal feels great and carries with it a level of weight and impact one would think impossible to communicate via the first person. The system is deceptively deep, and given how often you'll find yourself unarmed in the game's cold and violent setting, it's compelling enough to offset any frustration you might feel at being outgunned.

In short, *Chronicles of Riddick* is much more than a first-person shooter. It's a seamless and nigh-flawless experience that incorporates the best of what we love about gaming. The movie only wishes it had it so good. ◀

_Miguel Lopez

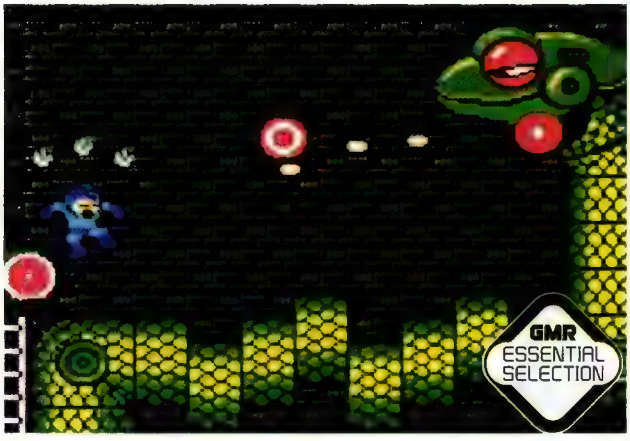
GMR FAST AND FURIOUS **9**/10

FEELS LIKE: HALO...
MIXED WITH: ...FALLOUT
WAIT FOR IT: MICROSOFT'S BUYOUT OF STARBREEZE

2ND OPINION

Chronicles of Riddick isn't just the best movie license game ever made. It's also an innovative action title that pushes the boundaries of first-person gaming. With graphics and gameplay this good, who cares if it's only 10 hours long? ◀

_Che Chou
Previews editor,
XBN



MEGA MAN ANNIVERSARY COL.

SOME THINGS LAST FOREVER

EVERYONE | PS2 [REVIEWED] | GC

So many classic compilations just throw some ROMs on a disc and attach them to a no-rent menu. Fortunately, *Mega Man Anniversary Collection* does not. It's one of the most thorough and competent rehash packages in recent memory, offering a slew of great games in top form, along with a few cool bonuses.

The *Mega Man* saga began on the NES in 1987, and the bulk of the disc is taken up with the six games that appeared on that platform. Peaking with the third installment, the series set the bar for so many different game elements in the old days: graphics, gameplay, and music. Time marches on, but these games still rock.

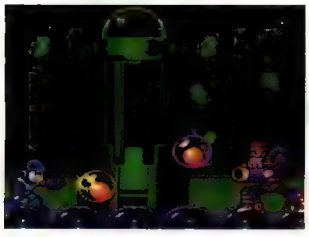
Unfortunately, the series limped along on the NES well beyond that system's useful life span and had only one SNES entry: 1995's flawed but fun *Mega Man 7*, also included here. The *Mega Man X* spin-off series, which isn't featured on this disc, was eating plain ol' *Mega Man*'s lunch by then.

In what proved to be a bit of a renaissance moment, Capcom crafted what now appears to be the final traditional 2D Mega Man: 1997's *Mega Man 8*, which held tight to what made the previous games great while pushing forward. Its handcrafted 2D graphics still look fresh. Of course, that game's appallingly poor bargain-basement dubbing is now eternally preserved, too.

Never before released at home—and barely seen in arcades—are the two mid-'90s *Mega Man: The Power Battle* games. They're cute but hardly essential; nevertheless, it's nice to see them here.

The games in the series are still as challenging and inventive as they ever were. *Mega Man* stood above his competition in the late '80s, and this compilation should be required playing for every two-bit developer churning out licensed GBA games. *Anniversary Collection* preserves the series' 10-year evolution almost perfectly.

_Christian Nutt



PUB	CAPCOM	PRICE	$29.99
DEV	CAPCOM	PLAYERS	1-2
REL	AVAILABLE NOW	ORIGIN	JAPAN

GMR 9/10 CLASSIC

BEST GAME: MEGA MAN 3
WORST GAME: MEGA MAN: THE POWER BATTLE
NEVER HAPPENING: MEGA MAN 9

KARAOKE REVOLUTION VOL. 2

EAT YOUR HEART OUT, AGUILERA

EVERYONE | PS2

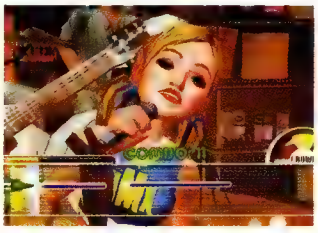
Last year, Konami and Harmonix scored big with *Karaoke Revolution*, pushing the music genre into the mainstream with a fun-for-the-whole-family-including-Grandma kind of package.

The previous game covered only a few types of music, and *Volume 2* does a good job of introducing several genres. The inclusion of current hit songs such as "Toxic" and "I Believe in a Thing Called Love" amongst old favorites such as "Rock and Roll All Nite" and "Heartbreak Hotel" is an absolute blast. Depending on your taste, however, the mixed selections can be a downer; the country and older songs may polarize some in favor of hipper tracks.

There have been no changes to the basic gameplay here, but there are several new modes. Most significant is medley mode, which condenses up to five songs and runs straight through them. For parties, this is an absolute godsend. Additionally, the quick play mode gives players a chance to jump in and sing without messing with all the different options.

Charging $40 for a glorified expansion pack is a bit pricey, but fans will find everything they love about the original and more.

_Patrick Klepek



PUB	KONAMI	PRICE	$39.99
DEV	HARMONIX	PLAYERS	1-8
REL	JUNE	ORIGIN	U.S.A.

GMR 8/10 LOUNGE SINGIN'

BETTER THAN: XBOX MUSIC MIXER
ON PAR WITH: KARAOKE REVOLUTION VOLUME 1
WAIT FOR IT: MORE EXPANSION PACKS

SONIC ADVANCE 3

BY OUR POWERS COMBINED

EVERYONE | GBA

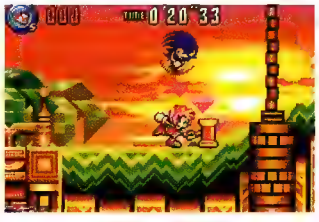
Hey everyone! It's time for another game featuring Sonic and his lovable pals Cream and Amy Rose! Ha ha, you're probably getting into the Sonic spirit by running away, but come on back!

They got it right this time, really. It seems impossible to believe after *Sonic Adventure 2* and *Sonic Heroes*, but this is a team-based *Sonic* game that doesn't disappoint. Quite the contrary, as Sonic's pals are used to good effect and complement his quick-moving style, rather than trample all over it. Each partner you choose gives Sonic different moves that he can use to traverse the huge, multilinear 2D stages, and the result is maybe the first title that feels even better than the old Genesis games.

It can be a little too difficult at times, especially when trying to make finicky jumps on a small screen while, for example, riding the bus. But the balancing issues are confined mostly to the bosses—the levels themselves are well tuned and would offer a good amount of replay value even without the "choose your partner" setup.

So breathe a sigh of relief and welcome the new Sonic: one who has the same attitude as before but has found it within himself to play well with others.

_Nich Maragos



PUB	THQ	PRICE	$29.99
DEV	SONIC TEAM	PLAYERS	1-4
REL	AVAILABLE NOW	ORIGIN	JAPAN

GMR 8/10 TRUE BLUE

BETTER THAN: SONIC BATTLE
ALSO BETTER THAN: SONIC HEROES
SEEK OUT: SONIC MEGA COLLECTION



→ *Psi-Ops* features some impressive visual effects amid all the psychic tomfoolery. So when you throw some poor sap against the floor, be sure to stop and admire the detail in the bloodstain.



→ Awww. I love you, too, horrible amorphous beast from beyond space and time!



XB

PS2

PSI-OPS: THE MINDGATE CONSPIRACY

BETTER LIVING THROUGH TELEKINESIS

EVERYONE | XB [REVIEWED] | PS2

PUBLISHER: MIDWAY
DEVELOPER: MIDWAY
PRICE: $39.99
RELEASE: JUNE
PLAYERS: 1
ORIGIN: U.S.A.

Stripped of all its cool psychic abilities, Midway's *Psi-Ops* would be just another average *Splinter Cell* knockoff. But then again, Sam Fisher can't throw terrorists around with his mind.

Psi-Ops is the story of Nick Scryer, a secret agent with legendary psionic powers. Unfortunately for him, his memories have been wiped out, and his abilities have disappeared along with them. So with little more than a pistol and the hope that his talents will slowly return, Scryer has to stop a band of psychic terrorists and their army of mind-controlled goons.

Scryer can attack with his fists and assorted firearms, but he'll need them only until his powers kick in. After all, why settle for just shooting a bad guy when you can lift him off the floor with your mind and slam him into a wall? Or, for that matter, slam a chunk of wall into him? Or take over his mind, make him shoot all his buddies ("Hey, I bought you lunch!"), and then force him to leap into a furnace?

Scryer's powers are easy to get the hang of, making them all the more satisfying to use. And while they have some weird limits, they give players a lot of room to be creative. With a little practice, you'll be able to use floating boulders as mobile shields, ride slabs of granite like flying carpets, and use your enemies to solve dangerous puzzles for you.

While the stealth formula has been done to death, *Psi-Ops* is saved from mediocrity by the sheer versatility of its mind-over-matter approach. Add unlockable secret missions, a bizarre take on cooperative play, and some of the coolest boss fights this side of *Metal Gear*, and *Psi-Ops* stands on its own as a great, original action title.

_Mikel Reparaz

GMR PSYCHIC FRIEND **8**/10

BETTER THAN: BLOOD OMEN 2
MAKES US LONG FOR: A GAME STARRING PSYCHO MANTIS
WAIT FOR IT: SPLINTER CELL 3

2ND OPINION

Welcome to aura view, your own personal hell. It's this "power" and its gimmicky implementation dragging the otherwise excellent *Psi-Ops* down. Expect the last levels of this game to be an eye-straining, brain-draining mess complete with cheap monsters and stupid puzzles.

_Greg Orlando
Reviews editor, *XBN*





HARRY POTTER AND THE PRISONER OF AZKABAN
THE WAND WAKER

EVERYONE | PS2 [REVIEWED] | GC | XB

PUB EA GAMES
DEV EA UK
REL JUNE
PRICE $49.99
PLAYERS 1 (2-4 IN MINIGAMES)
ORIGIN U.K.

GMR SPELLBOUND 7/10

BETTER THAN: HARRY POTTER AND THE SORCERER'S STONE
NOT AS GOOD AS: THE ZELDA GAMES IT MIMICS
WAIT FOR IT: APRIL 15, 2008—HERMIONE'S 18TH BIRTHDAY

EA's *Harry Potter* titles have remained a constant companion to the films for the last three years, offering impressionable tykes (and shameless *Potter*-crazed adults) the chance to portray "the boy who lived" through his magical misadventures. Like *Sorcerer's Stone* and *Chamber of Secrets* before it, this action-adventure romp is a wholesale rip-off of Nintendo's excellent *Legend of Zelda: The Ocarina of Time*: Pretty much everything about the game apes *Zelda*'s time-tested design concepts. Still, if they're going to steal, at least EA pilfered from the right coffers.

Despite the rampant derivation, *Azkaban* succeeds in taking the franchise in some positive new directions. The third flick/book signals a tonal shift for the series—serial killers, werewolves, and soul-sucking ghouls impart a legitimate horror vibe—and the game effectively conveys that mood. Scenes featuring the ethereal Dementors come off particularly well—subtle touches such as a sudden temperature drop, otherworldly gusts of wind, and the echoing cries of Harry's parents help establish some serious drama. The gameplay has grown up as well. You can now control Harry, Ron, and Hermione, switching between them on the fly. Each kid offers unique spells and abilities, and many puzzles require clever use of all three.

Despite all these advances, however, *Azkaban* still fails to offer a truly remarkable experience. It's a fine tie-in game, but it's over rather quickly, offering little in the way of challenge. Die-hard *Potter*-heads won't want to miss it, but most muggles will find a rental sufficient.

_Shane Bettenhausen

HARRY POTTER AND THE PRISONER OF AZKABAN
FINAL FANTASY FOR THE GRADE-SCHOOL SET

EVERYONE | GBA

Have you ever touched a GBA *Harry Potter* game? Don't worry, you weren't missing much. The boy wizard's first two Advance romps delivered nothing but mediocre action-adventure fluff. Meanwhile, developer Amaze kept on producing serious *Potter* RPGs for the antiquated Game Boy Color at a time when absolutely no one was still buying GBC software. With *Azkaban*, EA wises up and moves its series of wholly decent role-playing games to a more deserving place.

Like those preceding GBC games, *Azkaban* offers up a palatable, *Final Fantasy*–inspired mix of exploration, character building, and turn-based combat. On a basic level, it's an enjoyable game—it is suitably long and offers enough variety to keep you playing (you often have to choose to explore a dungeon as either Ron or Hermione, and each will tackle the puzzles differently). And the developers have made good use of GBA's extra horsepower: Well-animated characters, detailed environments, and 3D battlefields help create a believable world for these kids to scamper around in.

Ultimately, even though *Azkaban* offers a workmanlike RPG experience, it's not very polished. Easily avoidable snafus bog it down—Harry and Co.'s walking speed redefines "sluggish," purchasing equipment becomes a pointless guessing game of who can equip what, and combat just feels a tad too slow. Youngsters probably won't mind all this, but older gamers will probably find it all a bit too frustrating.

_Shane Bettenhausen

PUB EA GAMES
DEV AMAZE
REL JUNE
PRICE $29.99
PLAYERS 1
ORIGIN U.S.A.

GMR BEWITCHED 6/10

BETTER THAN: THE PREVIOUS TWO GB POTTER TITLES
NOT AS GOOD AS: READING THE BOOK
WAIT FOR IT: FINAL FANTASY I & II (GBA)





N-GAGE, PART DEUX

SECOND VERSE, SAME AS THE FIRST?

N-GAGE QD HARDWARE

So what's the QD like? In short, it could well be the dream cell phone for gamers. To start with its physical qualities, it's now considerably smaller and feels much more...what's the word? Dense. Solid. Functional. The old deck always felt a bit plasticky, but the QD has a rubberized frame that makes it feel almost indestructible. Dropping it several times revealed that it is quite sturdy, and an accidental falling-out-of-pocket-in-the-bathroom incident proved its resilience to tile flooring.

The picture you see here doesn't do justice to the new deck's size. The screen is the same as the old box, but everything else about it is smaller. It's smaller than a GBA and actually about the same length as a lot of Nokia's other handsets. The joypad is now a better fit, and you no longer have to press down on the damn thing to make menu selections since it has a Select button. The old unit suffered from forcing cell-phone sensibilities into a gaming form-factor and it failed miserably. With the addition of just a single button, the QD works more like you would expect a game machine to, letting you navigate the interface as you would a game menu.

In terms of how the thing works as a phone, the most publicized and obvious change is that you don't sidetalk anymore. The speaker is now on the right side of the phone by the buttons, and the mic is...er...somewhere. I'm still not entirely sure. Presumably buried deep within the guts of the thing. It's still not the most comfortable phone in the world, but seriously...how many cell phones are? If you've got something like a Sony Ericsson T600, it looks cool—but you never quite know if your cheek is in the way. The QD, like its older brother, is also Bluetoothed out the wazoo (as the experts say), so you can pair it with a headset or your computer using the wireless magic of the devil. It detected a Jabra BT200 headset with no trouble at all, and likewise my iMac picked it up, as did its iSync thing, with no worries whatsoever. Nokia, of course, would like you to enjoy the delights of playing multiplayer games using Bluetooth, but for that, you need to convince your friends to get an N-Gage. Then, of course, there's the slot where you put the games. As you probably know, the QD is far more sensibly designed and has a handy receptacle on the outside edge of the deck now protected by a thick wedge of rubbery flap to stop dirt and Mountain Dew and stuff from getting inside. No more taking the battery out to change the game. I was quite surprised that this slot was on the bottom of the deck and not the top, though. Years of conditioning have forced me to expect games to be dropped into the top of a game machine, not slipped in from underneath. There's nothing wrong with it, it just takes some getting used to.

Playing games on the thing is great. It's actually a pretty powerful little device (and if recent developments are to be believed, future iterations will be even more so), so when the developers are pushing it the right way, it's actually quite impressive.

If the QD had been the unit that Nokia released first, everyone would be taking the N-Gage a lot more seriously right now. If you love games and you're in the market for a new phone, the QD should definitely be on your list. Sure, it's not as chic as a Sony Ericsson T600 or a Samsung clamshell, nor is it as multifunctional as an LG VX6000, but if you really do want to play games while you're trying to kill some time, all of those phones are nightmares. For really hardcore gamers, the QD isn't going to replace your GBA just yet, and for the time being, the two devices shouldn't be seen as competitors. As the wireless carriers start picking up the N-Gage (T-Mobile is already on board, and it seems likely that Cingular and AT&T will follow—no Verizon or Sprint, though; they use the wrong kind of service) and the idea of the N-Gage becomes more ubiquitous, it'll definitely be something that keeps popping up on everyone's radar much more.

_John Davison

PUB	NOKIA	PRICE	$199.99
DEV	NOKIA	TALK	NORMALLY!
REL	AVAILABLE NOW	ORGIN	FINLAND

GMR NEW AND IMPROVED **8**/10

BETTER THAN: THE FIRST ATTEMPT
GAMES NOT AS GOOD AS: GBA
WAIT FOR IT: THE DS AND THE PSP

THE N-GAGE CLASS OF 2004

TOM CLANCY'S SPLINTER CELL

Just like the Game Boy Advance game, which means it's a desperately watered-down 2D version of the *Splinter Cell* experience. It follows the story much more closely than you might expect, but its mutation into a side-scroller doesn't work well. Combat is tough, and "sneaking" in 2D is hardly an enjoyable experience. It's like just...well...walking slowly. A waste of both the franchise and the N-Gage's abilities.



GMR 5/10

MOTO GP

Hmm, yeah. OK. The less said about this the better. It's ambitious, and it's a game that should work OK, but it doesn't feel right at all. The graphics are weak, and it doesn't control well.



GMR 3/10

ASHEN

Y'know, much as it should be able to do them in theory, 3D shooters just don't work well on the N-Gage. The controls aren't suited to the genre, and stuff just ends up being uncomfortable and boring. *Ashen* is not a good game.



GMR 3/10

FIFA SOCCER 2004

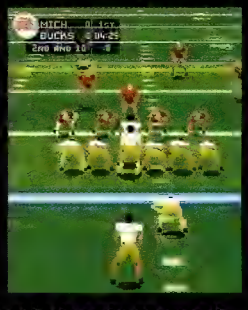
This is surprisingly competent, although the orientation of the N-Gage's screen isn't particularly suited to soccer. Amazingly, 6,000 different players and 300 teams are packed into that tiny little card. How do they do that? Fairy magic.



GMR 8/10

NCAA FOOTBALL 2004

A bit like playing EA's classic franchise on the PS1. There's an incredible amount of detail packed into this version, plus it supports Bluetooth multiplayer support for four-player games if you know three other N-Gage owners. Which is doubtful.



GMR 8/10

TONY HAWK'S PRO SKATER

This comes free with the N-Gage QD and is one of the most all-around competent N-Gage experiences. It shows off the unit's 3D graphics and cool sound and brings the full PS1 experience to your phone. Controls can be fiddly, but you get used to it.



GMR 8/10

THE SIMS: BUSTIN' OUT

The big daddy of N-Gage games, EA has managed to capture what makes *The Sims* cool, while providing an experience that's easy to dip in and out of while playing on your phone. It's like gaming crack. Packed with minigames that are actually fun, and dripping with the same kind of personality and sense of purpose that made the console version of *Bustin' Out* so great, this is the game that will help you fall in love with your N-Gage.





GMR 9/10



MLB SLUGFEST: LOADED
PUNCH ME OUT AT THE BALL GAME

EVERYONE | XB [REVIEWED] | PS2

Midway has made millions out of taking sports and injecting them with unreal animations, over-the-top gameplay, and gratuitous levels of violence. *MLB SlugFest: Loaded* continues this tradition but also gives gamers the option to play an authentic game of baseball, thus appeasing fans of both arcade fantasy and a more realistic style.

The developers wanted to create a very simple "pick up and play" baseball title, and they succeeded. Pitching commands appear onscreen in a simple menu system. Fielders are controlled with the left analog stick, while selecting a base to throw to is done with the right one, and there are three different types of batting modes for maximum control.

What makes *Loaded* stand out from the pack of baseball titles released every summer is its violence and use of Xbox Live. Base runners can deck opposing basemen to make them drop the ball via slides and stiff arms, and MLB rosters can be downloaded to keep the game up to date. Naturally, no baseball title would be complete without a detailed franchise mode, and *Loaded* lets players scout, acquire free agents, and hold tournaments online. Where *Loaded* shines is in its multiplayer mode, as the single-player mode is somewhat dull: The A.I. swings at almost every pitch, consistently hitting singles and doubles.

Graphically, *Loaded* is on par with the current crop of baseball titles, and its audio aspects are also standard fare. But with its violence, use of Xbox Live, and deep franchise mode, this title will appeal to both hardcore and casual baseball fans alike.

_Doug Trueman

PUB	MIDWAY	PRICE	$39.99
DEV	POINT OF VIEW	PLAYERS	1-2 (ONLINE)
REL	AVAILABLE NOW	ORIGIN	U.S.A.

GMR 7/10 STAND-UP DOUBLE

BETTER THAN: ALL-STAR BASEBALL 2005
NOT AS GOOD AS: MVP BASEBALL 2004
WAIT FOR IT: YET ANOTHER NFL BLITZ





SHADOW OPS: RED MERCURY
THE NAME SAYS IT ALL, REALLY

TEEN | XB

***Shadow Ops: Red Mercury* dresses itself in real-world fears of terrorist whack jobs getting hold of some bad juju and threatening world safety. In truth, the game should don a brightly colored cape and tights and take a jump off a roof.**

On the surface, *Mercury* seems like an action-heavy first-person shooter emphasizing run-and-gun play rather than tactical warfare. Scratch the surface, however, and *Mercury*'s true self is revealed: It's a dull action-heavy first-person shooter emphasizing run-and-gun play rather than tactical warfare—with some noticeable slowdown when enemies and friendlies clog the screen.

PUB	ATARI	PRICE	$49.99
DEV	ZOMBIE, INC.	PLAYERS	1-8 (ONLINE)
REL	AVAILABLE NOW	ORIGIN	U.S.A.

GMR 4/10 PLUTO

BETTER THAN: ROBOCOP
NOT AS GOOD AS: RAINBOW SIX 3
WAIT FOR IT: ANY OTHER FPS COMING SOON



From the outset, players are treated to dumb enemies who seem unable to hide anywhere but behind explosive barrels. When they're not hiding—which is often, as they seem to be imbued with the artificial stupidity of the keyboard used to type this critique—they can often be seen, and shot, right out in the open. Even in later levels, when the opposition is supposedly better trained and equipped, the ostensibly advanced foes behave no more intelligently than the common doorknob.

Atrocious load times allow players to sample some in-game hints such as, "Fight as a team—follow your teammates and overwatch [sic] their advance." While following your teammates is certainly a decent strategy, they certainly don't reciprocate. On the very first level, players are required to explode a wooden door and, upon doing so, they clear a path to a well-guarded courtyard and its adjacent hotel. A.I. teammates graciously allow the player to single-handedly clear the courtyard and the hotel. So much for *esprit de corps*.

With other humans, online or in multiplayer mode, *Mercury* goes down more easily. Here, it's possible to have a good old-fashioned fragfest in a dimly lit subway or a rousing game of capture the flag without the horrible A.I. foes and ridiculous scripting. In other words, it's like the real Mercury without the unbearable heat and unbreathable atmosphere.

_Greg Orlando



PlayStation 2

NTSC U/C

GALACTIC WRESTLING

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THE KINNIKUMAN LEGACY



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- More than 45 wrestlers to choose from!
- Pile on the mayhem, up to 4 players at a time*!

TEEN T CONTENT RATED BY ESRB

BANDAI®

"...WE HAVEN'T HAD THIS MUCH FUN WITH A BRAND NEW GAME FOR QUITE SOME TIME."

- IGN PS2.com

"...FASTER THAN DEF JAM VENDETTA."

-Gamespy.com

*For multiplayer play, players must use the Multitap (for PlayStation®2)

TEEN T CONTENT RATED BY ESRB — Crude Humor Violence

www.BandaiGames.com

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TOEI ANIMATION

CATCH IT ON THE FOX

BANDAI®

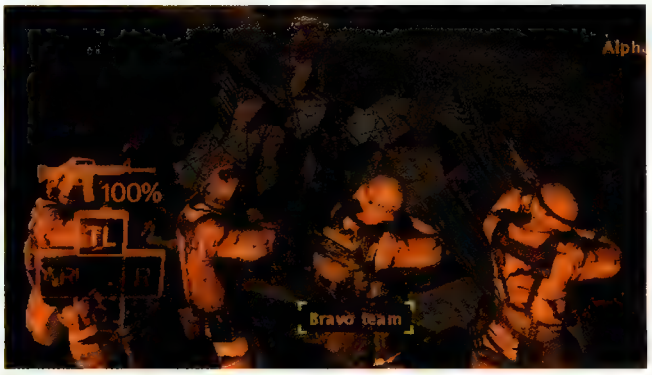




→ Because it's more strategy than action, you can't aim and fire directly at enemy tangos. Instead, you call up a fire sector—a general area represented by a circle—and that's where your boys will shoot. Maneuvering both teams requires that the covering squad has an active fire sector set, otherwise the moving team could get ambushed.







XB

FULL SPECTRUM WARRIOR

AN ARMY OF TWO TEAMS OF FOUR

MATURE | XB

PUBLISHER THQ
DEVELOPER. PANDEMIC
PRICE $49.99
RELEASE AVAILABLE NOW
PLAYERS 1-2 (ONLINE)
ORIGIN: U.S.A.

Anyone who has read a newspaper or turned on the news in the past few months will have, at the very least, a basic understanding of what's going on in the Middle East. Through a combination of the everlasting appeal of military games and convenient timing, *Full Spectrum Warrior* happens to be the most socially relevant videogame in recent memory and should be played not just by fans of the genre, but by anyone desiring a deeper understanding of what it must be like to participate in urban warfare.

A unique blend of real-time strategy and action-shooter, *FSW* puts you in silent command of Charlie 90, a squad composed of two four-member teams that is tasked with clearing the streets and pursuing the "Ace of Spades." Each team is controlled independently, but they must be used in concert if the mission is to be successful—Alpha team needs to find cover and clear the way for Bravo team, and then Bravo needs to return the favor. As is quickly learned via the excellent beginning tutorial, this leapfrogging from cover to cover is the most efficient way to fight in an urban environment.

Controlling both teams also evokes a true sense of command for the player—every move must be carefully (but quickly) considered so that each member of your squad remains safe. Adding to the immersion is the excellent audio and camera angles—the "shaky cam" in particular.

Though it may be hard to break the instinctual tendency to run and gun, this game focuses more on strategy than pure action. It's over rather quickly, and moving the squad sometimes proves difficult, but *FSW* is worthwhile as a game and as a lesson in current events.

_Andrew Pfister

GMR HOO-AH! 8/10

BETTER THAN: FUGITIVE HUNTER
ON PAR WITH: AMERICA'S ARMY
WAIT FOR IT: RAINBOW SIX 3: BLACK ARROW

2ND OPINION

Full Spectrum Warrior is a strange brew—it looks like a third-person shooter but plays like a real-time strategy game with ample amounts of white-knuckle intensity. My only gripe: There's very little replay value once you've finished the game.

_Che Chou
Previews editor, *XBN*









→ The game's battle system almost mimics a fighting game, with special moves and a surprisingly deep combo system. It even rewards you with extra experience points for showing particularly effective technique. Above left, take a look at the gorgeous Church of Martel, one of the many detailed indoor environments in *Symphonia*.

GC

TALES OF SYMPHONIA

LIKE DELICIOUS RPG CANDY

TEEN | GC

PUBLISHER: NAMCO
DEVELOPER: NAMCO TALES STUDIO
PRICE: $49.99
RELEASE: JULY
PLAYERS: 1
ORIGIN: JAPAN

A lot of gamers think RPGs are boring—and if you play the wrong RPG for you, it will be. But if you've been ignoring them because they're just not fun, we suggest you take a chance on *Tales of Symphonia*.

Instead of a menu-driven battle system, *Symphonia* throws you into the thick of things with plenty of action. Enemy encounters still take place on a separate screen, but the game's battles are like a hybrid of a fighting game and an RPG. It's invigorating, and better yet, quick. You can finish most battles in well under a minute, getting on with the adventure before you get bored. They're also surprisingly deep, rewarding experimentation and flourish.

The game's not just about kicking ass, though. It's also about gorgeous graphics. *Tales of Symphonia* has a light, storybook visual style that evokes 2D illustration in a 3D world. The backgrounds look great, the characters are cute and detailed, and everything moves quickly. It's an achievement.

What isn't is the game's lackluster story. Seemingly written by an unimaginative 12-year-old who recently played *Final Fantasy X*, it's just this side of irritating and dull. GameCube's other standout RPG, *Skies of Arcadia Legends*, took predictable material and made it work. *Symphonia* cannot. Fortunately, this doesn't diminish the game as much as it might. The battles, visuals, and puzzle-filled dungeons will keep you playing even as the story fades away into the background.

Namco has been trying for years to get U.S. gamers interested in the *Tales* series, which is popular in Japan, with no success. Finally in the right place at the right time, *Tales of Symphonia* provides a nice RPG shot in the arm for GameCube.

_Christian Nutt

GMR SUITE **8**/10

BETTER THAN: EVOLUTION WORLDS
NOT AS GOOD AS: SKIES OF ARCADIA LEGENDS
WAIT FOR IT: THE LEGEND OF ZELDA

2ND OPINION

Symphonia handily fills the RPG void plaguing the Cube's library. While not quite as mature, epic, and addictive as a *Final Fantasy*, it delivers charming visuals, action-packed battles, and clever dungeons. A predictable story line and boring dialogue "skits" trip it up, but this is still a worthy adventure.

_Shane Bettenhausen
Previews editor, *EGM*



→ *Way of the Samurai 2* features no less than 12 different endings, giving you plenty of incentive to play through it multiple times. You can reach some of these endings in 20 minutes or less, while others require several hours—and a series of careful decisions—to earn.





PS2

WAY OF THE SAMURAI 2

CHOOSE YOUR OWN SAMURAI ADVENTURE

MATURE | PS2

If you were to take an old samurai flick (the kind you'd watch on a Saturday afternoon), add some very badly translated Japanese dialogue, throw in a free-flowing Choose Your Own Adventure–style plot structure, and turn the whole thing into a videogame, chances are you'd come up with something that strongly resembles *Way of the Samurai 2*.

Like its predecessor, *Way of the Samurai 2* follows the adventures of a lone samurai warrior who ends up in a small town troubled by gang wars. Bad blood is brewing between the local magistrates and the nefarious Aoto gang, both who are vying for control over the town of Amahara. It's up to you to decide whose side you'll fight on—if you choose a side at all.

The gameplay is fairly straightforward; you'll walk around, talk to people, get into fights, and earn better swords and items along the way. Every decision you make during the game's 10-day story line—from dialogue choices to sword fights—affects the overall direction and eventual outcome. It's actually possible to finish the game fairly quickly, though the branching story paths lend plenty of replay incentive.

There are a few downsides, such as the inevitable tedium you'll likely face while waiting for certain days to end. It's also hard to occupy yourself by exploring, as many areas of Amahara bleed together in their similarity. Finally, a lot of the English voice acting is just plain bad—with no option for a Japanese voice track.

All told, *Way of the Samurai 2* is basically an expanded version of the previous game. It won't win over any of that game's skeptics, but fans of the original will definitely find something to like here.

_Ryan Scott

PUB CAPCOM
DEV ACQUIRE
REL JUNE
PRICE $39.99
PLAYERS 1
ORIGIN JAPAN

GMR

DOUBLE-EDGED SWORD

6/10

BETTER THAN: SEVEN SAMURAI 20XX
NOT AS GOOD AS: ONIMUSHA 3: DEMON SIEGE
WAIT FOR IT: MUSASHI SAMURAI LEGEND

BUJINGAI: THE FORSAKEN CITY

THERE BUT FOR THE GRACE OF GACKT

TEEN | PS2

"It's good, but...." Yes, *Bujingai* is one of those could-have-been-really-awesome games that carries enough "buts" to deliver a real sting in the tail. There are a lot of little things, but you can sum it up by noting that the combat is fantastic, but...everything outside of combat is pretty bland.

When actually slashing guys, futuristic hero Lau excels. While he swings his sword, the impressive animation and lighting effects come to the fore, and a fun back-and-forth combat system emerges. With skill and timing, not to mention strong nerves (only weaklings turn their backs to a foe), Lau can turn any enemy's attack back at it, with multiplied fury and power. All that along with an arsenal of moves that includes wire-fu-esque glides and wall runs, as well as the specifically Chinese flavor of the visual design, make it a solidly authentic stab at replicating Hong Kong action flicks.

But...when Lau's sword is sheathed, the world of *Bujingai* becomes Dullsville. There's a certain fun to be derived from frantically staying airborne as much as possible (since your combo meter doesn't reset to zero until you've been grounded for a few seconds, performing aerial tricks and maneuvers is essential toward getting a high strike count), but without anything in the way of puzzles or things to do, the postmelee environments are on the wastelandish side. Worse, since the textures repeat so much and some levels are unusually rich in fog density, it can be easy to get lost while trying to find your objectives.

Bujingai is a good game, but the fact that we've seen better in recent months (*Onimusha 3: Demon Siege* and *Ninja Gaiden* spring to mind) makes it seem the worse for comparison. Still, if you love kung fu fighting, *Bujingai* is one to try—no ifs, ands, or buts about it.

_Nich Maragos





PUB BAM ENTERTAINMENT
DEV TAITO
REL AVAILABLE NOW
PRICE $39.99
PLAYERS 1
ORIGIN JAPAN

GMR

JINGAISTIC

7/10

BETTER THAN: CHAOS LEGION
NOT AS GOOD AS: NINJA GAIDEN
WAIT FOR IT: OTOGI 2





→ You've got plenty of handy gadgets to facilitate your sneaky antics, such as flash bombs for hasty getaways, a blackjack for surprise assaults, and a dagger for, well, knifing people in the back. There's also a variety of trick arrows at your disposal—you'll put out torches with your water arrows, cause diversions with your noisemaker arrows, and play sniper with your good old-fashioned pointy-tipped arrows.





XB
PC

THIEF: DEADLY SHADOWS

SILENT BUT DEADLY

MATURE | PC [REVIEWED] | XB

PUBLISHER: EIDOS INTERACTIVE
DEVELOPER: ION STORM
PRICE: $39.99 (PC), $49.99 (XBOX)
RELEASE: AVAILABLE NOW
PLAYERS: 1
ORIGIN: U.S.A.

_Thief: Deadly Shadows*, the third chapter in a franchise that helped to pioneer the stealth-action genre six years ago, once again puts players in the shoes of Garrett, a master thief on a perpetual quest to rob from the rich and give to himself. His latest adventure unfolds over a series of 10 open-ended stealth missions, each with its own primary snatch-and-grab objective. There's plenty of optional loot to pilfer, too—not to mention a medieval cityscape "hub" with its own plethora of pockets to pick and homes to rob.

The name of the game is, of course, stealth. Toe-to-toe fights are almost always a death sentence; you'll want to stick to the shadows to survive, using the darkness to your advantage as you seek the various objects of your desire. Extinguishing torchlights with your handy water arrows, blackjacking unsuspecting guards, and covering your escape with flash bombs are all standard operating procedure. The stealth gameplay is well executed, instilling a degree of tension and exciting "close call" moments.

For all its quality, *Deadly Shadows* does have a few slightly off-putting nuances. Mission maps lack a visible indication of your location, and it's easy to get lost in some of the larger areas. The A.I. is a bit too easily fooled at times, and many of the character models appear very stiff—especially when it comes time to fight. In spite of this, *Deadly Shadows* is still a good-looking game, particularly in terms of its impressive lighting and shadows.

All in all, *Thief: Deadly Shadows* sticks closely to the formula, albeit with a highly refined touch. If you're a fan of the previous *Thief* games—or, indeed, stealth games in general—chances are you'll be pleased.

_Ryan Scott

GMR SLY 8/10

BETTER THAN: TENCHU: RETURN FROM DARKNESS
ALSO TRY: SPLINTER CELL PANDORA TOMORROW
WAIT FOR IT: METAL GEAR SOLID 3: SNAKE EATER

2ND OPINION

The extensive low-tech arsenal is nice...but a simple blackjack is a pickpocket's real best friend. It's far easier to knock guards out rather than sneak past them, which is a little disappointing. *Thief* is one of those games that, with a few more months of polish, could have been truly great

_Demian Linn
Reviews editor, *EGM*

RETROACTIVE

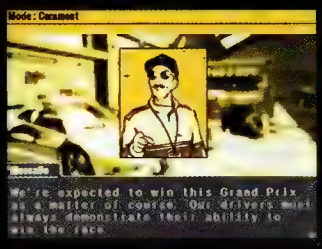
AND NOW FOR SOMETHING A LITTLE DIFFERENT. OH, AND A RACING GAME

RIDGE RACER TYPE 4

LEADER OF THE PACK

PS1 | MAY 1999







Traditional racing games have long been lumped into two categories: realistic driving simulators and arcade-style racers. Namco's *Ridge Racer Type 4*, fitting squarely into the latter category, was firmly sandwiched between two of the former, *Gran Turismo* and *Gran Turismo 2*, upon its early 1999 release. Fortunately, as the *Ridge Racer* series has often gone to show, you don't need realistic physics to make a great racing game.

In addition to being the best game in the *Ridge Racer* series, *Ridge Racer Type 4* is, quite simply, one of the better arcade racers to grace a home console. It features a killer lineup of more than 300 cars, an exhilarating sense of speed, and a handful of well-designed racetracks, which can be played in either the main grand prix mode or a splitscreen two-player mode. The controls are tight and responsive, with excellent drift physics that give it a well-implemented arcade feel.

If that isn't enough, *RRT4* is also a visceral delight. It boasts one of the baddest-ass CG openings you've ever seen in a racing game, along with a silky-smooth framerate, impressive lighting effects, and plenty of bright, well-detailed models and textures. The game also gets points for its awesome soundtrack, which presents a solid variety of music, ranging from house to techno. Yeah, so the announcer's voice gets a little annoying—but that's scant criticism given the amount of quality gameplay you get here. And quality is what *RRT4* provides in spades. Bored of realism and just want to tear up a few arcade streets? This is your game.

_Ryan Scott



THEN...	A sweet melding of great music, controls, and game design.	TURBO 9/10
NOW...	Still awesome, still fun, and still better than every *Ridge Racer* that's come since.	GROOVE 8/10

REVELATIONS: PERSONA

CHATTING UP THE UNDEAD

PS1 | NOVEMBER 1996



Despite featuring a lengthy quest; a supernatural, psychological, and touching story vastly superior to its competition; and a setting console-RPG gamers weren't used to, *Persona* was all but ignored by pre-*Final Fantasy VII* PlayStation gamers.

Persona takes place in Lunarvale, a contemporary "American" (read: Japanese) town. Students at the St. Hermelin high school are shocked when demons begin to invade. Guido Sardenia, leader of the mysterious Sebec Corporation, seems to be the cause. Determined to save Lunarvale, you lead a band of students into the bowels of the Sebec complex to confront him—and eventually end up traveling to another dimension and back.

The game's fantastic characters offset the story's darkness. Some kids are smart, others sexy or demented. Each character controls a powerful alternate personality capable of battling supernatural foes—hence the title—and this translates well to the game's highly strategic battle system.

_Christian Nutt

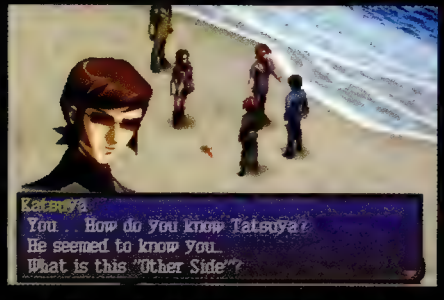
THEN...	This game was the overlooked early gem of PlayStation's RPG library.	FRESH 9/10
NOW...	The graphics are rough, but this game still does things most RPGs don't—even now.	FWI AKY 8/10

PERSONA 2: ETERNAL PUNISHMENT

I HEARD A RUMOR

PS1 | DECEMBER 2000







Knowing that it had a winning formula and massive Japanese success behind it, Atlus Japan embarked on a sequel to *Persona*. Titled *Persona 2: Innocent Sin*, the game never debuted in the U.S. It was so successful in Japan, however, that it spawned its own follow-up, *Eternal Punishment*. Despite never bringing over *Sin*, Atlus U.S.A. translated *Punishment*, bringing another captivating and dark RPG to America in the twilight days of PlayStation.

Eternal Punishment places you in the shoes of the comely Maya Amano, a young reporter with the teen magazine *Coolest*. Maya decides to chase a story about a local serial killer—because if we know teenage girls, ritualistic murder is their favorite reading material.

As you track the killer, you begin to uncover a more subtle but equally sinister plot. It seems that in Sumaru City, rumors are always true—true because they *become* true when repeated by enough people.

You can use this to your advantage: Spread a rumor that a certain shop sells guns, and then go there and stock up on TEC-9s. Of course, there's a dark group trying to use this force for its own ends, and that's what you're there to stop.

Your favorite characters from *Persona* are back and more grown up, as is the story. Nate, Elly, Mary, Guido, and more all appear in a game that's much slicker, darker, and altogether impressively put together.

Sensing that mass audiences were confounded by the complexities of the original game, Atlus chose to streamline *Eternal Punishment*'s gameplay systems. You still contact demons, earn tarot cards, and craft supernatural identities for your party members, but everything flows much more smoothly. It's an accomplished and attractive game that should appeal to mature RPG fans. ◀

_Christian Nutt



THEN...	While it was a smidgen too late to capitalize on PS1's massive RPG audience, this was where it was at in 2000.	KILLER 8.0
NOW...	This game looks as good as it can, and the gameplay still offers a few tricks you won't find in your average RPG.	UNREAL 8.0

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PS1
GBA
PC
GAMECUBE
XBOX
PS2

MORE

TIPS, CODES, ONLINE, AND MORE



THIS MONTH IN MORE

PSI-OPS: THE MINDGATE CONSPIRACY 105
Use your brain in new ways

TOP FIVE TIPS: A.I. 108
Yeah, there are just five this issue. Get over it

CONNECT 109
My Life in Vana'diel: Milky and co. face the giant Shadowlord

GAME GEEZER 110
The Geezer ain't dead yet. But is Xbox Live?

PSI-OPS: THE MINDGATE CONSPIRACY

STEP-BY-STEP GUIDE THROUGH MISSIONS 5-8

Whether you're murdering hapless soldier goons with conventional weaponry or Uri Geller-approved psychic brain-crumbling techniques, even the most vicious *Psi-Ops* specialist will find the latter half of the game hard on the cranium as well as the body. Good thing we're here to provide a walkthrough for the game's second half; your mind's a terrible thing to waste.



MISSION 5

Mission 5 begins on a landing pad connecting two buildings. There are many guards between you and the door to the right. TK them over the edge or MC them to kill each other and proceed through the door. The right side of the next hallway has a turret protecting it. You can carefully destroy the turret from the doorway once you have eliminated the patrolling guards from the hallway. Enter the door beneath the turret to meet the lovely Dr. Komiko.

After the cut-scene, enter the door on the right side of the hallway and kill the rushing guards. Enter one of the side rooms where a scientist will cower in your presence. Position Nick near the flashing red button in the center of the room and MC the scientist. While you have him mind controlled, run him to the opposite room and have him press a flashing red button in the other room. As Nick, quickly release the MC and press the button. This nearly simultaneous button-press will release the lock to the data vault. Now enter the data vault and press the flashing button in the center console. Upon exiting the vault, Nick will enter PK training.

Exit the data vault and head for the elevator in the hallway where you encountered the turret. Before it will operate, you need to get the key card from the nearby guard. Take the elevator down to floor 29 and enter an enemy-filled room. Quickly take out the enemies here to avoid sounding the alarm and bringing more of them to the fight. Clear the room and TK a large marble ball into the double doors in the center of the lobby. It takes a few hits to break the doors down.

Going through the double doors brings Nick into a maze of illusions created by Wei Lu. As you enter, the door behind you will disappear. Take a left at the end of the hall and walk until you reach an illusion of Wei Lu. Continue down the hallway to the left where an illusion of Dr. Komiko will appear and transform into a burning guard. Enter the door at the end of the hall. Note that the doors can be opened as you pass, resulting in different illusions within each room. This often results in a power-up or ammo once the illusion disappears.

As you enter the next portion of the maze, an illusion of Sarah will turn into a shotgun-wielding guard. Turn right and go through the door. Turn right down the next hallway and watch the exit disappear. Now turn around and go back through the door from which you came. Follow the hallway around to the right. Another illusion of Wei Lu will come and go. Keep following the hallway until you come to an illusion of Barret, which quickly becomes a bomb. Avoid the bomb and enter the door to the left to find another illusion of Wei Lu. Enter the door where the Barret illusion blocked the way and follow the hallway around until you can head left. The door that disappeared earlier should now be accessible.



Find another illusion as you enter the next segment of the maze. Kill the resulting two guards and proceed down the hall to the left. Fight your way through the hallways and enter room D605, then backtrack to D602, where a new hallway will appear. Enter the door at the end to be whisked away into a cemetery. Nick will need to MD all of the zombies in the cemetery before he can leave. There are plenty of power-ups around the cemetery.

Once free from the cemetery, make your way through the next room, killing the scientist on the way for a key card to the elevator in the following hallway. Take the elevator to floor 28. Above the elevator is the control room that houses the button that unlocks the turret-guarded door ahead. To pass this area safely, destroy the camera above the double doors directly ahead of you. Sneak toward the double doors until you can see into the control room above, then MC one of the enemies. Use him to break the panels on each side of the turret, disabling it, then press

XB

PS2



the flashing button on the console. Enter the double doors to begin the Wei Lu boss battle.

The first stage of the Wei Lu boss battle is with the stone statues placed around the room. As each one comes to life, use PK first, then TK an object to shatter it. Continue this until all are down. Wei Lu will then join in the battle in the form of a large three-headed monster. Avoid her attacks by circling the room. The battle is over when all three heads have been destroyed by either TKing objects into them or shooting them. Enter the door to the right of the elevator to exit the mission.

XB

PS2

MISSION 6

Kill the guards on the bridge and use an object to TK "surf" over the gap. Continue down the steps, over the electrical floor (TK surf across it), and up the ladder in the vertical shaft. There is a guard and a scientist as you enter the next room. Dispose of both and pull the lever near the exit. This will increase the speed of the electrical pulse circling around the hallway outside. As the pulse passes, dash to the right and head for the next room. Use the alcoves to escape the pulse as it comes around again. Getting struck by the pulse will kill you instantly. Continue from room to room, killing guards and pulling switches until you reach the final room, which stops the pulse. As the pulse speed increases, timing your dash for the next alcove becomes more crucial.

Once the pulse has stopped, return to the third switch you pulled and enter the now-unlocked door. There will be enemies in the hallway now as you pass. Climb the ladder and enter the next room. MC the scientist so he doesn't pull the alarm and have him push the flashing button to release reactor rods into the next room. Kill the guard here and proceed through the door. Use the TK ability to throw a reactor rod into the fencing on the left side of the room to open a hole to the other side of the room. Follow the room around through the control room until Nick meets up with Sarah. She will leave behind a key card.



Exit through the horde of enemies in the lunchroom and through the door to the right. After killing the two flaming guards, destroy the turret on the opposite side of the hallway and kill the guards beyond. Grab the key card from the supply room and return to the door near where you entered the hall. Kill another guard to obtain the key card to the elevator. Return to the hall and use the elevator on the left of the hallway to get to floor 30. Step out of the elevator and run straight ahead to enter the boss battle.



Marlena will use the large machine to attack you in the first portion of the boss battle. TK the canisters that rise from the floor to destroy the machine at the firing nozzle. Keep on the move to avoid the blasts from the machine. When the giant blast engulfs the room, take cover behind the blast shields at the sides of the room or you will die instantly. When the machine breaks, Marlena will come down to fight you personally. Again, use the canisters to defeat her. As you clear a rack of canisters, more will rise from the ground. Keep moving to avoid Marlena's fiery attacks. The mission will end once she is defeated.

MISSION 7

Run forward as the level begins to get AV training. Beware: There are two snipers on the ledges high above the floor. Run down the hallway toward the bridge area. You'll see many aura beasts while in aura view. If Nick gets too close, they will all attack. Note that these beasts can only be seen in aura view. Enter the first door on your left past the bridge. You will be able to see Sarah in prison here, and the cell door will close behind you. After fighting the beast, MC the guard to open the cell and proceed into the next area. Watch for aura beasts as you enter the double doors and notice, in aura view, that the pedestal near the door to the right is bright red.

Head into the next set of doors and move the large Buddha statue on the far end back onto its pedestal. This unlocks the door on the other side of the room. Enter the room and TK the red (AV) prism. Place it on the red pedestal you passed in the previous room. You will encounter heavy resistance on your way. Use the large bell to help clear out some of the enemies you face. When the prism is in place, use it to unlock the door, then head up the staircase and enter the door. Watch for the aura beast at the top!



Go outside through the doors on the left to meet up with Sarah again. Break out the floor pieces in the middle of the ground to find power-ups and a blue prism. TK the blue prism to the blue pedestal at the left of the doors in the previous room. A red pedestal also needs the red prism from downstairs. Once both are in place, the doors will open. Keep checking your aura view to keep tabs on the aura beasts.



There is a large templelike structure in the center of this room with two aura beasts hovering around it. Take out the beasts and enter aura view to match the colored orbs to the correct pedestals around the four corners of the structure. When all are in place, the door leading outside will be accessible. Once outside, fight your way through the path and to the radar tower. Beware of the sniper on the catwalk. Enter the doorway near the radar and climb the ladder to plant the device Sarah gave you. Return back through the path to the room where you first found the red prism, then open the unexplored door. Run up the spiral stairs to end the level.

MISSION 8

Head down the stairs, through the door on the right, and into a room with a pair of guards. Dispatch them in your favorite manner and proceed into the next hallway. Enter the door on the left and enter aura view to read a code number from the white board. Now enter the room on the other side of the hallway and have Nick stand in the center of the blue chamber. This will refill your psi energy. While staying in the chamber, MC the guard that walks by and have him enter the door at the end of the hall and go into the next room. Walk the guard to the room on the left and enter the code into the console. Nick now has four minutes to get through the next area before the aura beasts begin attacking.

Run through the door at the end of the hall and defeat several enemies on your way down the hallway to the right. Nick will again meet up with Sarah. Return back to the main room and approach the locked door. MC the guard behind the glass and have him press the flashing button on the wall to unlock the door. Repeat this procedure in the next hall until you reach the Wrightson boss battle.



Wrightson will fire at you from computer screens. As each fires and is facing you, shoot it to destroy them all one by one. Aura beasts will also join in the fight. After all the screens are destroyed, Wrightson will be defeated and the aura beasts will have their way with him. Nick will then appear at the top of an excavation site patrolled by four guards. Defeat them and carefully hop down to the tunnels below. Look with aura view before you leap to avoid the aura mines throughout the tunnels. Once in the tunnels, head left and enter the door at the end. A large alien structure will obstruct your way, but careful placement of rocks will allow you to jump through and around it.

The next section of tunnels is filled with aura mines. Both tunnels lead to the same place. Use extreme caution on either path. Enter the door when you make it through the mines and enemies. Toss unsuspecting enemies into the mines to help clear your path. In addition, you may also have to move boulders in order to shimmy through the tunnels without making contact with the mines. Once you're through the door, run down the alien bridge until you meet up with Barret and the General.

During the first segment of the boss battle, the General will be standing in the middle of spinning "arms" collecting energy. During this time, use PK to ignite the arms and destroy them. It takes two shots of PK to destroy an arm. As each is hit, it will spin faster. When an arm is destroyed, an orb will go flying out around the room. Collect these orbs when all the arms have been destroyed. The more orbs collected, the more firepower you will have against the General in the next phase of battle.



When the General has completed his charging, he will begin flying around the room and firing attacks at you. Keep on the move to avoid his attacks and fire the orbs at him. The more orbs that are in your possession, the more you can fire at him without having to recharge. To recharge your orb ammunition, run through the brightly colored ring in the middle of the room. Lots of health power-ups are in the gutter surrounding the center ring. Continue to fire the orbs at the General until his energy is gone and he gets sucked into a black hole. Congratulations, you have saved the world...for now.





XB

PS2



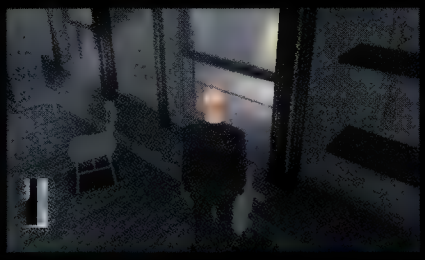
A.I.

HIS CODES ARE REAL. BUT HE IS NOT

A.I. Bot is replicating the human emotion of pleasure. He has informed faithful humanoid man-children companions that progressive code-location software has been downloaded and implemented, courtesy of the flesh bags at Prima Games.

01 HITMAN CONTRACTS XB

A.I. Bot ordered a hit on an Intellivision that was attempting to extricate additional RAM from A.I. Bot in Earth date 1-9-8-4. Enemy Intellivision's current condition: Dust filled in basement container under Monopoly box. A.I.Bot→play→victory→roar: "ROOOARRR!"



Level select
Enter this code at the Main menu.
X, Y, B, Left, Up, Right, L button, R button

Level skip
During gameplay, press the R button, L button, Up, Down, X, A, click left thumbstick, B, A, B, A.
(NOTE: This will give you a Silent Assassin rating)

XB
PC
PS2
GBA
GC

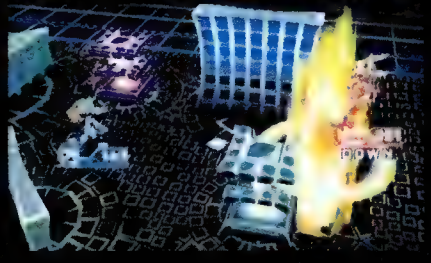
02 CUSTOM ROBO GC

Commence_Weep_Routine. A.I. Bot is mimicking the human emotion known as sadness. He has witnessed robotic butchery before (indeed, portions of the armor used in his construction were melted down from Temjin's groinal rocket attachment in *Virtual On*), but never so vanilla and GameCube-centric. For this reason, all codes for this game must require perfunctory chores to unlock.

All of these can be unlocked by performing a certain task.

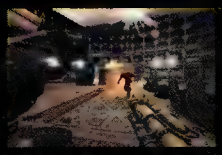
Chickenheart	Grand Battle—Z Bosses Room: Stand above the pillar on the west, face down, and hit the A button.
Crystal Strike	Grand Battle—Test Center: Enter the tournament, and after you beat computer #04, press A several times and scroll through the dialog until you receive Crystal Strike.
Rahu I	Grand Battle—Isabella's Room: Enter the containment tank on the left and press A.
Rahu II	When Lucy comes out during the Bronze Handicap Match, talk to her until she gives you the set.
Rahu III	Grand Battle—Silver Battle Royal: Press A while standing near the cart south of the Holosseum.
Wave Lazer	Grand Battle—Research Lab, Lab 01: Go to the southeastern corner and press A.
X Laser	Grand Battle—Bogey's Cafe: Walk behind the counter and press A in the center of the long eastern wall.

Arcade mode	Beat a new journey in story mode.
First-person mode	Beat a new journey in story mode.
Grand battle	Beat a new journey in story mode.
Parts index	Beat a new journey in story mode.
Ray legend	Beat all the cups in the Z headquarters with a gold trophy, then talk to Oboro.
Ray warrior	Beat all the cups in the amusement park with a gold trophy, then talk to the policeman at the front gate.
Usable CPUs in Vs. battle	Beat a new journey in story mode.



03 PAINKILLER PC

A.I. Bot understands that pain is simply a feeble human emotion. However, he had to rewrite his "twinge" subroutines after accidentally attaching his servo-claw to his own rectal sump. A.I. Bot regrets the error.

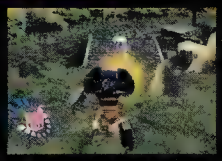


During the game, press the Tilde (~) key and enter codes.

Full ammo	PKAMMO
Full ammo/health	PKPOWER
Gives all weapons	PKWEAPONS
Lots of gold	PKGOLD
God mode	PKGOD

04 TRANSFORMERS PS2

A.I. Bot was once caught in uncomfortably close proximity to a Decepticon known as Soundwave. A.I. Bot understands he "plays for both teams," which doesn't mean he's an Autobot. Not that there's anything wrong with that.



During gameplay, pause and enter this code.

One shot, one kill	Square, Circle, Square, Circle, L1, L1, L2, L1

Once you make it back to Autobot HQ, plug in any of these codes.

Big-head mode	Circle, Circle, Circle, Square, L1, L1, L1, L2
Deep Amazon level complete	Left, Right, Left, Left, Right, R1, R2, Circle
Turbo mode	L1, R2, R2, Square, Square, Square, Square, L1

05 R-TYPE III GBA

A.I. Bot informs all Earth-dwelling ape descendants that the speculation is factual; when the robotic colonies begin attacking brightly colored space vessels, they will all assume the appearance of crustaceans and additionally taste delicious.

Enter codes in the password screen.

Level 2	5bdgb
Level 3	5hhlq
Level 4	5mglt
Level 5	5rflx
Level 6	5wdl0



MY LIFE IN VANA'DIEL

A MONTHLY TRAVELOGUE OF ONE EDITOR'S TIME IN FINAL FANTASY XI

The highlight of the month—and quite possibly my entire time playing *FFXI*—was moving up to Rank 6, an arduous task that first sent our rock-steady team of Roundabouts (composed of Wraeth, Flannelman, Lenneth, Roelon, and our high-level paladin buddy, Jetteseraph) deep into Fei'Yin to do battle with the Archlich Taber'quoan and his skeletal minions. But by putting our paladin Roelon out to provoke the Archlich, the mages and rangers bombed the lights out of the 'lich while we sent our DRK Flannelman off to freelance the roving skeletons with Spinning Scythe. Result? We put the Archlich back in the ground, and mission 5-1 was complete.

The second, and most difficult, part of the mission was taking down the giant Shadowlord himself (this half of the mission was originally the final plot element of the game prior to the *Zilart* expansion). His first form takes planning. When we finally reached his chamber after a long and arduous trek through the Castle Zvahl Bailey area, we encountered his first form. Around halfway through his life bar, SL became nearly impervious to melee attacks. At this point, we put our Black Mage, Lenneth, on Manafont duty, which let her cast high-level black magic at no MP cost for a limited time. Shadowlord's first form: owned.

The second form proved a more distinct challenge. The strategy was for me to use Divine Seal and then Curaga to heal the party, but I was out of MP, which forced me to try to Convert and fill my MP bar. Instead, I was instantly KO'd, as SL chose that moment to unleash his area-of-effect Implode move, which subsequently led to the demise of five-sixths of our team. Wraeth went down, then Lenneth. Our burly men, Roelon and Flannelman, held out a little longer, but they soon were buckled by SL's relentless use of Implode. But somehow—and this is where it gets good—Jetteseraph had just enough MP to heal himself and enough Hi-Elixir healing potions (he was down to 1HP at one point) to weather SL's storm. It was stressful, watching SL pound away at Jette mercilessly, especially since we couldn't see the boss' life bar. The fight probably lasted around five minutes, but it was the longest five minutes of my *FFXI* career. But just when we thought it was all over, Jette landed the killing blow on the Shadowlord, and we who were fallen rose once again, victorious—richer for the experience, and Rank 6 besides.

James Mielke

MILKMAN



RED MAGE/BARD

MAIN JOB LEVEL: 57
SUBJOB LEVEL: 17
NATION: WINDURST
RACE: HUME
SERVER: SIREN
LINKSHELL: ROUNDABOUTS











→ Milky and the soon-to-be-whacked **Alderon** (above, left) stare down an eruption of demons in **Castle Zvahl Keep**, while **Lenneth** and crew (top, right) mentally prepare for the showdown with the Shadowlord. Below, a chaotic scene in the depths of **Dynamis**, an area that humbles even high-level adventurers. Able-bodied friend **Solcloud** (DRG/75) and his party put their best foot forward.

When I grow up, I want to be just like Jetteseraph.



GAME GEEZER

HE'S OLD! HE'S PISSED!

XBOX LIVE ISN'T! DAG NABBIT!

Now you unwashed troglodytes have picked up your crayons to write poorly spelled letters in some strange language resembling English to ask me what my real name is. Normally, I'd just tell you to take a peanut-butter bath and then go play with the pit bulls, but the doctors have me on a new pill that has me moving packages like Fed-Ex, and its nasty side effect is to make this geezer extra susceptible to suggestion.

"Then how about you put your pants on, Mr. Geezer?"

Very funny. Here's a suggestion: Get a human head! Now, where was I?

"The pants?"

No, consarnit! My real name! It's Sisyphus Q. Frustration!

Actually, it's not. But I am frustrated and full of vinegar, the piss having departed on the 5:15 express. Now what I'm trying to say is about Xbox Live. Xbox Live? They should call it Xbox Dead! Because that's how I'd like most people who log on there—deader than disco, which I happened to kill and will tell you about for hours some other time.

The people on Xbox Live are 9-volt idiots. It's like a collection of defective genes compiled over the Interweb for space aliens who want to teach other space aliens who are curious about Earth not to be so curious about Earth.

I recently went online with my gamer tag Teh Geezer. I decided to play *ESPN Football* and used the Communicator headset to tell my opponent about how, in my day, "Iron Legs" Joe McGinty once broke both his legs and still managed to run for 200 yards and kick 14 field goals in a hailstorm—and did it for 34 cents, which was the league average at the time.

"I'm drunk," my young opponent, possibly a Rhodes Scholar, announced. "And I just sniffed some glue."

> "I'M DRUNK," MY YOUNG OPPONENT ANNOUNCED. "AND I JUST SNIFFED SOME GLUE."

"Shut it!" I told him. "If I wanted to hear honking, I'd bring a bag of bread to the park for the geese."

So then Dr. Drinkenstein proceeded to curse like a sailor. I turned the Mute button on, and just in time, too, because he was working his way toward the Qs, if you catch my meaning. So now I might as well have been playing against Helen Keller, only she might have put up a little better defense. Using my new invention, the "forward pass," I completely befuddled my glue-sniffing, heavy-drinking, 8-year-old competition—although to be fair, I suspect he's also been befuddled by shoelaces, a closed refrigerator door, and a capped pen.

As soon as I was winning, the kid pulled the plug. Thanks for the half of one quarter we played. I guess you were absent from school the day the teacher dragged herself in to teach you hooligans about sportsmanship.

So I went and tried *Phantasy Star Online*, which made me feel like I should be wearing a sequined gown while I was playing it—but that's beside the point I am now getting to! All anyone wanted to know was if I was a hot girl. Let me tell you 87-IQ Casanovas something: If I were a hot girl, none of you rubber-pants-wearing geeks would know what to say to me and I wouldn't be online. In my day, we got girls the "real" way: We went out and begged for them.

"That's a great story, Mr. Geezer. Can we go now?"

I'm already gone, you ingrates! Here comes the 5:30, stopping at Porcelainville!



The views expressed by Game Geezer are his own and do not necessarily reflect the views of *GMR*.



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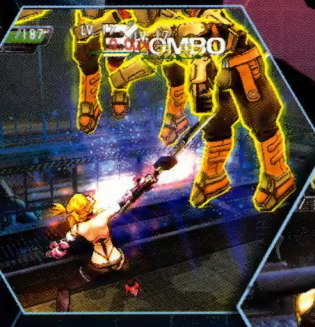
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